



REPORT OF: Leader of the Council

TO: Executive Board

ON: 9th June 2022

COUNCIL RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC – 2021/22

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic over the last 12 months. A similar report was presented to Annual Council in May 2021 to highlight the responses and achievements from the first 12 months of the pandemic.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- a) Executive Board note the contents of this report.
- b) Note that a full pandemic report will be presented to full council by the end of this calendar year.

3. BACKGROUND

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, our communities have experienced some of the worst effects of this devastating virus. As the pandemic developed there was an increasing acceptance that places with high levels of deprivation, larger black and minority ethnic populations, higher density and overcrowded housing, greater numbers of workers in key frontline occupations and younger population profiles had higher risks from Covid-19 in terms of infections, hospitalisations and deaths. Blackburn with Darwen has all of these key risk factors and we will need to continue to be vigilant to ensure the suppression of the enduring rates of transmission experienced by the borough to date.

Up until March 2022, we have seen more than 55,000 positive cases of Covid -19 in the Borough. In April 2022, universal free testing provision via LFDs and PCRs was ended and the contact tracing programme was also ended (with exceptions in health and social care settings). The wider impact of this has been a significant reduction in the data available to us around positive cases, transmission and other data we have become accustomed to during the pandemic. We are no longer able to report on Covid-19 at the same depth we have previously, now drawing on the data from the regular ONS survey for a more accurate picture of case rates.

The Government released its Autumn & Winter Plan in September 2021, outlining steps that would be taken throughout the Autumn & Winter period to help fight Covid-19. During the winter period, England moved into Plan B, following the rapid spread of the Omicron variant. This resulted in:

- Face masks becoming compulsory in most public indoor venues (other than hospitality)
- People asked to work from home if they can
- The NHS COVID Pass becoming mandatory in specific settings, using a negative test or full vaccination via the NHS COVID Pass.

These measures helped to bring down cases over the Christmas period and all Plan B measures were removed at the end of January 2022. Significant changes to Covid-19 policy and guidance came in April 2022, when anyone with a positive test did not need to isolate; testing provision was withdrawn and the test and trace function was ended (with exceptions in health and social care settings).

Covid-19 is still a concern for many of our residents and partners across the public, private sector and VCFS sectors. Businesses and employers have faced the reality of how Covid-19 has affected them and are still faced with an uncertain and unprecedented future. As a civic leader, the Council has a crucial role to play in delivering services through business as usual and supporting residents and businesses to live with Covid-19.

4. RESPONSE HIGHLIGHTS

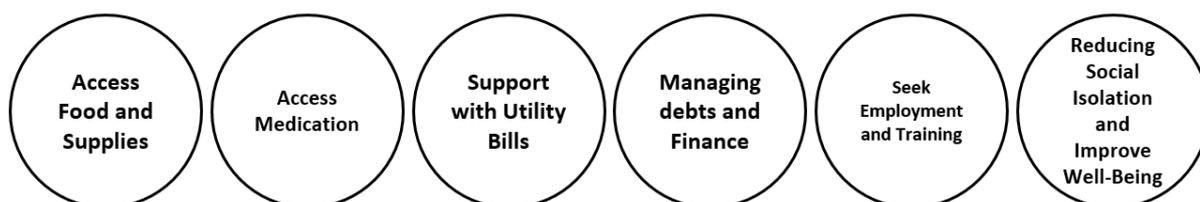
This report provides an overview of the key activity that has taken place across the organisation and with support from businesses, VCFS partners and communities in the Covid-19 response. A full pandemic report is planned for later in the year to identify response highlights whilst also allowing us to identify lessons learnt and to support future planning.

A. ADULT SERVICES & PREVENTION

Colleagues have supported Care Sector Providers throughout the pandemic, for example by distributing several Covid funding streams including the Infection Prevention Control Grant, the Workforce Recruitment and Retention Grants and Omicron Fund. Additionally, the Care Sector Response Group have maintained daily contact with Providers and have produced daily situation reports, outbreak management support and ongoing advice and guidance throughout the course of the pandemic.

Adult Social Care staff have worked creatively and flexibly throughout the Pandemic to ensure that our most vulnerable residents were protected and that their needs were assessed and responded to. We also supported a number of Providers directly, for example by deploying members of our own workforce into Care Homes during times of staffing crisis to ensure residents continued to receive the care that they needed. As a means to support hospital discharge, we have also increased our Crisis Domiciliary Care capacity and continue to meet the requirements of the national frameworks.

In addition, throughout the past twelve months, the Help Hub has continued to operate and provide recovery and resilience support to residents. Key activities included supporting families and adults to;



During the past year, the team have managed 1283 resident requests; dealt with 947 customers reporting that they were worrying more than usual due to their current circumstances and provided 352 customers with additional support following their initial enquiry. *Well-being* and *Food and Supplies* remained the biggest areas of need identified and the team were innovative in their support of residents in a number of ways.

From 1793 requests for food support, 754 requests resulted in a referral for food supplies. Working closely with the Isolation Support team, we were able to deliver food parcels to residents unable to leave their home due to Covid-19. The team also supported people to access their own supplies through supporting with online shopping, getting support from family, friends and

neighbours that they hadn't considered. 27% of requests came from residents who were self-isolating. Through discussions with customers, a further 352 people were identified as needing further support from their initial request.

A key part of our response has been the Covid Community Champions (CCC) which were established to directly communicate with the community, delivering accurate information regarding vaccinations and providing essential feedback to the Council and the NHS. This provided local insight and intelligence and more importantly, helped us identify what was needed to ensure everyone had fair and equal access to the vaccination. A key aspect of their work was to dispel misinformation thereby supporting residents to make an informed choice.

The Champions project also recognised a need for a Long Covid Peer Support group. They started to see the impact of Long Covid through feedback from the community and we have, along with our colleagues across Re:fresh and Adult Learning, filled a gap to help support our residents with practical solutions and a real sense of support from others in a similar position.

Volunteers have continued to support the Covid-19 response in the past 12 months with over 60 Befriending phone calls made a week and 1858 volunteer hours logged via the befriending service. Over 300 food and essential parcels were delivered by volunteers within the community a week at the height of demand.

B. PUBLIC HEALTH & WELLBEING

An important part of the Council's ongoing Covid-19 response has been to support the management of incidents and outbreaks in a wide range of settings such as care homes, schools, refuges and Houses of Multiple Occupation.

We have continued with a multi-disciplinary Incident Management Hub (IMH) to help us to effectively manage Covid-19 incidents and outbreaks. Led by the Director of Public Health and Consultants in Public Health, the IMH includes representatives from Public Health, Public Protection, Education, the NHS, Adult Social Care, UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), Neighbourhoods, Communications, Infection Prevention Control and testing and vaccination teams.

The IMH continued to meet regularly to review information and intelligence about local incidents and outbreaks and agree what action to take to limit further spread of the virus. This includes:

- Making decisions on whether there is an outbreak and instigating joint outbreak control plans and meetings, as necessary
- Advice and guidance on effective infection control measures
- Mobilising rapid testing to support outbreak managements
- Establishing support systems for vulnerable people affected by outbreaks
- Managing the other consequences of an outbreak including business continuity, media and communications
- Using intelligence about incidents and outbreaks to support local communications, engagement and enforcement activities

To ensure a comprehensive local response, specialist teams have continued to deal with outbreaks and incidents in care homes and schools. These teams, along with other setting specific single points of contact, report directly to the IMH to ensure a fully coordinated local response. The Council's Public Protection Service has continued to provide specialist support where cases are identified in locations such as factories, offices, and hospitality and retail locations.

The Communications team have provided essential support to the Core Covid team throughout the pandemic. During the second 12 months of the pandemic, various communications campaigns were developed to help share key public health guidance and to ensure that residents were informed of the various restrictions as they regularly changed.

12 MONTH NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

Delta variant wave in Blackburn with Darwen

Communications were developed to support surge testing and surge vaccination programmes in those areas with highest cases of the Delta variant. This included media relations, social media messages and a variety of communications assets to support community engagement work, including translated assets delivered to homes, used on ad vans, and videos shared on social media, by email, text and WhatsApp.

Wider roll-out of the Covid vaccine to over 12s

Communications were developed and national assets were shared to encourage take-up of the vaccine, targeting groups with lower take-up. Working with the local CCG, we supported by amplifying their messaging around the roll-out of the Covid vaccine programme to over 18s, then 16 & 17 year olds, then 12-15 year olds through a school vaccination programme, then boosters for all over 18s, then spring boosters. Communications supported the hyperlocal pop-up vaccination clinics and the engagement work in communities with lowest take-up of the Covid vaccine, and a Vaxx Facts social media campaign was developed to address myths still circulating, including videos from midwives addressing vaccine safety for pregnant women.

Stay Well This Winter household leaflet

An information leaflet containing infection prevention and control advice, as well as details of support available to residents to stay warm and well over winter, was developed and delivered to every home in the borough.

Omicron surge and introduction of Plan B measures

Communications were developed and national communications assets were shared to highlight the tightened restrictions under Plan B, and to encourage eligible businesses to apply for Omicron hospitality & leisure grants.

Testing

Further development of the #TestAndGo campaign to encourage regular testing with lateral flow tests to help prevent community transmission, including new assets linked to Christmas and New Year.

Covid Community Champions

Communications were developed to support the recruitment of volunteers to the Covid Community Champions, and then weekly updates to share the key messages we needed their help to share across their communities and networks. Communications were developed to promote the Long Covid peer support group, and the Communications team facilitated a report on BBC North West Tonight about the support on offer in the borough and its impact on people with Long Covid.

Self-isolation support pilot

Communications were developed to highlight the support available to people testing positive for Covid through the self-isolation support pilot, including developing 10 Days Your Way branding.

Front line services such as libraries, museums and healthy lifestyle and leisure teams continued to adapt and develop creative ways for public access and support, even when buildings remained closed. Staff adapted quickly using digital solutions and their engagement skills growing services' reach through investment in small scale technology including e-books, audio and video software and equipment for blogs, virtual tours, on-line 121 and group support groups and immersive virtual fitness classes.

Libraries were the first of the Council's public buildings to re-open followed by Blackburn Museum and the Leisure Centres - all welcoming people back, operating safely within the changing Covid-19 guidelines. King George's Hall and Darwen Library Theatre re-opened at the end of the summer with a busy programme of events, bookings and rescheduled shows, including a record breaking pantomime season with packed audiences returning to enjoy Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Customers really appreciated staff's attention to detail, feeling safe and welcomed back and overwhelmingly reported the importance to their health and wellbeing on being able to stay connected to cultural and leisure services throughout the pandemic.

C. CHILDREN'S, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION

Excellent work has continued in response to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic and the wellbeing of our children and young people has remained at the forefront of all response activity. It remained a priority for children and young people to be seen face to face as part of the assessment process and their wishes and feelings continued to be gathered to inform their plan. We continued to deal with children who needed an urgent response and protection and Social Workers utilised PPE and Covid-safe advice to protect themselves and the children. Whilst this was sometimes not possible due to the nature of the work, Social Workers remained stoic in ensuring the safety and well-being of children. An office rota system was utilised to ensure the safety of staff and we realised an added workforce benefit of this approach was to offer support, advice and guidance for Social Workers who were going out on visits and being able to respond to the needs of the community. We continued to keep staff updated by sharing changes and revisions to Covid-19 guidance and restrictions on a weekly basis as a minimum and we also invited partners to keep accurate updates on their response to Covid-19.

We experienced staffing pressures within our Residential Children's Homes with Covid-19 transmission. The nature of the close living situations meant that transmission risks were high and this resulted in an often daily response to ensure capacity of staff. There was an excellent response from the whole service with staff responding to different working patterns to ensure that familiar people were available to the residents. Again, an unforeseen positive consequence we have is that we have an established bank staff list that can be utilised across the Residential network.

Staff experienced new challenges with some parents who used the pandemic as a means of keeping professionals at arm's length in order to disguise concerns within the home. This behaviour was factored into assessments and the response undertaken by the service. Staff utilised virtual meeting options to remain Covid-safe but continued to hold face to face meetings where necessary and returned to face to face as soon as possible. Phones were also utilised for virtual visits and conversations with children, young people and their families and our adolescent population appreciated this type of communication and this has remained in place once restrictions ended due to the positive feedback we received.

The Children's Advice and Duty Service (CADS) team have been available to schools for advice throughout the pandemic to discuss any concerns for the welfare of a child, escalating to a referral where appropriate and required. We have progressed a multi-agency partnership in CADS to fortnightly multi-agency CADS review meetings where cases are reviewed and audited as a multi-agency group.

We have had to undertake a flexible, creative approach to the impact on children and young people requiring accommodation outside the family home. There has been some stalling in the past 12 months of care proceedings with them not concluding in a timely manner. This has meant that children and young people did not transition to permanent arrangements. This has created additional pressure on seeking the right placements. We worked alongside the Commissioning Team to overcome this by ensuring referrals are child centred and informed by the child. We have also included the offer that a potential placement would receive from BwD as Corporate Parents and this has achieved some real success in finding the right matches for our children and young people. We have continued with this in our new normal due to its success.

As has been documented and evidenced throughout the pandemic there has been a significant impact on children, young people and their education. Between 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 there were a total number of 9174 positive Covid-19 cases reported from schools and educational settings.

Type	
Staff	3124
Pupil	6049
Setting	
Early Years	190
Primary	4729
Secondary	3187
Special Schools	220
Colleges	848

The Education Response Team have continued to support schools and settings throughout the 2021/22 academic year. The team has dealt with numerous confirmed cases in schools and settings over the past 12 months resulting in over 13,000 children being sent home to isolate and over 1000 staff. Many of the confirmed cases generated phone calls and emails looking for advice, reassurance and guidance which resulted in meetings with Headteachers and senior leaders to review cases where multiple cases have been reported or concerns have been raised. A daily de-brief allowed cases to be discussed, lessons from the day to be shared, and concerns raised to allow for a proactive approach to be taken to emerging issues. Health Protection Teams (HPTs) also played an active role in this approach.

The team has had to interpret, re-write and keep abreast of guidance that was provided on a daily basis. Members of the team carried out walk-throughs of schools looking at how they operate, forensically checking procedures and risk assessments to ensure that what they say, they do. In addition, training was provided for Madrasahs in BwD including providing a user friendly resource to help manage single and multiple cases in settings. We provided all schools and colleges with refreshed guidance, test kits, and PPE to ensure they met the requirements for the autumn term in 2021 so they became an on-site Asymptomatic Test Site.

There were numerous guidance changes between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022 which resulted in an influx of queries from schools and settings. Supporting documentation such as the schools' risk assessment was updated regularly as well as the Public Health Resources pack. Headteachers were kept informed of all changes and updates via the Headteachers Bulletin. Prior to this, changes to school 'bubbles' and self-isolation for under 18s also resulted in increased queries and requests for support. Following the removal of all Covid-19 restrictions in April 2022, a revised risk assessment was developed for schools focussing on managing infections, including Covid-19 in their setting.

Despite our schools and settings dealing with cases of Covid-19 they have continued to ensure that attendance levels are the highest in the region (this is recorded via returns to Department for Education). Attendance levels of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan and vulnerable learners (those with a social worker) are typically in line with national average or slightly above / below. BwD had the lowest number of children and young people on average that needed to be isolated due to a confirmed case and this was attributed to the excellent management of 'bubbles.' This good practice has been highlighted by the DfE and Regional Schools Commissioners office.

Blackburn with Darwen Young People's Services and the Strategic Youth Alliance delivered a street-level engagement programme through weekly detached work and community based, Covid-19 secure events over a 6 month period from March 2021 – August 2021. The aim of the project was to deliver stay safe messages, sign-post young people to structured provision and provide them with on the spot advice and guidance around Covid-19 restrictions, testing, vaccinations and issues facing young people in our communities.

The Strategic Youth Alliance is made up of 10 organisations including Young People's Services. The Covid Engagement Project demonstrated a real collaboration between the organisations, strengthening their relationships and supporting the smaller organisations to grow and gain confidence in a large strategic project. We used links with other areas of Adolescent Services including Youth Justice Service and Engage (Exploitation Team) as well as the Police and the Community Safety Partnership to identify particular hotspots for Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), Child Criminal Exploitation and the areas highlighted by the COVID Patrol.

As information filtered down from Public Health England around the lifting of restrictions we ran Community Events to strengthen our links with the public and provide a secure environment for young people, parents and carers to start socialising in a COVID safe space.

Project Successes

Improving links with local community – feedback from members of the community, and particular leaders within the community, has strengthened significantly. Out teams have been able to deliver support and reassurance at ground level when a lot of our target audience has felt isolated.

Introducing agencies and signposting Young People to provision – having teams carrying local information, job vacancies and access to provision through referral has led to the young people of Blackburn with Darwen engaging through a difficult period where engagement hasn't been possible through traditional methods.

Numbers of young people engaged with throughout the project – our overall REACH for the project has been excellent. This is due to the flexibility of our staff teams and the skillset they possess to approach, gain trust and build relationships with young people.

Reduction of ASB in certain areas – attending daily COVID update meetings has meant that we have had update to date information to map our response and act on reported issues (not only COVID related)

Fun Days – feedback from parents, young people and members of the community has been positive throughout and described as a ‘breath of fresh air’ and fitting way to start the long road back to normality for our young people who have been badly affected throughout the pandemic.

D. ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Public Protection & Environmental Health maintained an enforcement presence on our streets to the end of covid secure measures, and supported businesses through the changes as restrictions were lifted in stages in April, May and July 2021, at which point all but the most general legislative controls ended. Towards the end of the restrictions our contact with businesses became increasingly light touch, as would be expected, with advice and encouragement to maintain voluntary controls being the main approach adopted. A significant doorstep test and trace presence was maintained until cessation of contract tracing in February 2022, with enhanced contact tracing during the rise of the delta variant being a particularly intensive period. The Service has also supported businesses with outbreak control advice throughout this time, with the end of 2021 and beginning of 2022 being a very busy time in this respect. With the removal of enforcement restrictions in July 2021 the Service has built legacy covid-secure work into its routine activity, and is working towards returning to business as usual, identifying and reducing backlogs of work which have developed during the period of covid enforcement.

E. GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

Since the start of the pandemic the Council has provided direct financial support to local businesses as part of the Government’s Covid-19 strategy. Over the pandemic period (March 2020 – March 2022) the Council has supported thousands of local enterprises through both mandated Covid-19 business grants and discretionary Covid-19 business grants to businesses either excluded from the nationally mandated schemes or of strategic importance to the borough.

The mandated schemes include the:

- Small Business Grant (March – June 2020)
- Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Grant (March – June 2020)
- Local Restrictions Support Grant (Open) (August – November 2020)
- Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) (November – December 2020)
- Local Restrictions Support Grant (Addendum Tier 4) (December 2020)
- Wet led pub grant (December 2020 – January 2021)
- Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) (January – March 2021)
- The Restart Grant – April 2021 (April 2021)
- Omicron Leisure and Hospitality Grant (January – March 2022)

The Council distributed c. £65m in direct financial support in over 12,000 individual grant payments to local enterprises.

The discretionary grant schemes included:

- The Local Authority Discretionary Grant Fund (June – August 2020)
- The Additional Restrictions Grant (November 2020 – March 2022)

The Council distributed c. £7.5m in direct discretionary financial support in over 2300 individual grants and exhausted its allocation of discretion funds that were made available by the Government at the time. In total, the Council has defrayed over £72m in grant support in over 15,000 individual grants and supported a wide range of sectors including, but not limited to manufacturing; close contact services; leisure and hospitality industry; driving instructors; taxi drivers; market traders.

F. DIGITAL & CUSTOMER SERVICES

Throughout 2021/22, the pandemic continued to have a significant financial impact on residents and businesses in the Borough. As a result, the Digital and Customer Services teams within the Council continued to produce a number of new online forms via the Digital Customer Portal (DCP) and arranged for Q&A discussions to be held for businesses with business experts, in light of government announcements. Additional funding from Government was received specifically to support the homeless population and economic support to businesses through discretionary grant schemes.

The online forms assisted with self-isolation support payments for residents and grants to businesses impacted by the pandemic. Furthermore, due to the ongoing restrictions in March 2021, residents were making fewer journeys and avoiding travel where possible. This impacted taxi drivers who continued to operate their services. As a result, the Taxi Driver Covid-19 grant with a one-off grant of £500 was launched. The need for financial support was also reflected through the increase in customer visits to various Council receptions, with the main reason of the visits including Covid Isolation support payments and benefits applications. In November 2021, the visits peaked at an average of 80 customers per day visiting receptions across the Borough. The team continue to offer their assistance to residents and businesses in the borough, through the second phase of work on the portal that began in April 2022.

Public Protection & Environmental Health maintained an enforcement presence on our streets through to the end of Covid-19 regulations and supported businesses through the changes as restrictions were lifted in stages in April, May and July 2021. At this point all but the most general legislative controls ended. Towards the end of the restrictions our contact with businesses became increasingly light touch, as would be expected, with advice and encouragement to maintain voluntary controls being the main approach adopted.

A significant doorstep test and trace presence was maintained until cessation of contract tracing in February 2022. With the removal of restrictions in July 2021, the Service has built legacy covid-secure work into routine activity, and is working towards returning to business as usual, and identifying and reducing backlogs of work which have developed during the period of covid enforcement.

G. FINANCE & GOVERNANCE

The tables below provide a breakdown of the Test and Trace self-isolation applications and subsequent payments made to residents. Around business rates and reliefs, we have paid a total of 12,701 grants (£64,698,358) (this excludes grants administered by the Growth and Development portfolio). In total, we have administered retail discount totalling £26,305,762, through a total of 5612 transactions.

Total applications		
	Apps	Paid
Standard total	10505	2,191,500.00
Parental total	576	120,500.00
Total	11081	2,312,000.00

Total successful applications		
	Apps	Paid
Standard	2557	1,278,500.00
Discretionary	1826	913,000.00
Parental standard	198	99,000.00
Parental discretionary	43	21,500.00
Total	4624	2,312,000.00

Whilst it is difficult to convert the contribution of other teams within the portfolio to monetary values, their contribution to the success of projects such as the Help Hub has been instrumental. The Registrars team's response to the Covid-19 is well-documented in the 2020-21 report and colleagues within but not limited to Customer Services; Council Tax, Business Rates and Benefits teams have all performed outstanding work once again in the past 12 months. Processing grants; collecting arrears, processing increased numbers of benefit applications has all been undertaken whilst dealing with business as usual activity.

Summer 2021 saw Blackburn with Darwen experience a surge of the Delta variant along with many other Northern Local Authorities. The severity of the surge resulted in the deployment of Military Aid to the Civil Authorities (MACA) for military resources to support the surge testing programme. This request was approved by the Secretary of State DHSC on the 2nd June with the arrival of 55 military personal from 19th Regiment Royal Artillery on 4th June. The military took over the running of the two council LFT test sites at King George's Hall Blackburn and The Works Darwen and the running of five council community collect and return hubs. The MACA was for a 4-week period with the military departing on 26 June.

A request was also made to deploy the DHSC Surge Rapid Response Team (SRRT), this request was approved on 3 June with a team of 50 people being deployed over the weekend periods of 11-13 June, 18-20 June and 25 – 27 June. The SRRT operated out of the Blackburn Army Reserve Centre (ARC). Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council provided overall leadership for surge testing with operational support from 19th Regiment Royal Artillery and the SRRT. The combined team was co-located in Blackburn Town Hall.

During the surge testing period approximately 51,505 PCR tests were issued and 37,873 were collected. In addition, 15,035 lateral flow tests were issued. Between this period of 18th May and 2nd July 2021 approximately 32% of the population were tested.

August 2021 saw the creation of the Core Covid Team however, many of the staff were already supporting the local Covid-19 response prior to the team's formal creation. Staff have accumulated considerable knowledge and experience around step-up and response activity and this is also the case for Covid-19 leads in individual departments. The Targeted Community Testing scheme was established in July 2021 and was successful in enabling us to support communities, businesses and residents with easily accessible testing kits as well as onsite testing through our asymptomatic testing sites. Easy access to testing kits was particularly important during the Omicron wave and to support residents with changes to self-isolation guidance and the need to test to leave isolation early.

BwD established a council led contact tracing service, working closely with NHS Test and Trace to give help, advice and support to those who needed to self-isolate. Our local contact tracing services and holistic support model was launched in July 2020 and was amongst the longest

standing and well-established in England. Our service was holistic and connected residents with the Help Hub that linked those who were isolating or in need with essential services such as befriending, medication delivery, mental health support and more. Data has demonstrated that our local contact tracing service reached people effectively, proving that difficult, hard to reach cases passed down from the national team were served better locally. The offer of a wide range of tailored advice and support, a local number and a local voice, with knowledge and understanding of the borough and its residents, were the main determinants of our success.

The council was successful in securing funding to create a Self-Isolation Support pilot. The pilot contacted people and/or households, who had been told to self-isolate, within 24 hours to offer a bespoke plan to support self-isolation. The pilot targeted the whole population of Blackburn with Darwen and provided an insight into what worked best to support those who test positive and their contacts to do the right thing to protect themselves, their families and wider communities. The pilot allowed tracing data to be closely monitored and matched with referrals to the police in order to identify any trends around non-compliance. The identification of trends allowed targeted engagement work to be carried out and the trends monitored.

The government announced on 6th October 2021 that a new Household Support Fund (HSF) grant would be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need. The Household Support Scheme will be run by the Council and local partners, to assist residents of Blackburn with Darwen to access food, support with energy and water bills, and other essential items.

Funding was made available for:

- Blackburn with Darwen children, families and vulnerable adults
- single claimants with an annual household income below £21,152
- couples with an annual household income below £31,731

The Council is working with a number of local organisations, who can offer support, with the addition of:

Age UK	Care Network
BwD Healthy Living	BwD Home start
Rummage Rescuers	BwD Carers Service
Jubilee Tower Credit Union	Shelter

The Help Hub has assisted with the Household Support Fund scheme that covers support with utility bills and essential items. 2297 applications have been processed to date. The Government have announced the scheme will be further extended to help with the rising cost of living.

The Vaccination programme changed the trajectory of the pandemic and can be attributed to the saving of lives and protection from severe illness for many across the borough and country. The Local Vaccination Programme has been progressing well since its inception with 77.2% of the 12+ population having received their first dose and 71.5% receiving their second dose. (Data from 20th April 2022) However, despite these overall high levels of uptake, there continue to be signs of lower uptake in lower income and some ethnic minority groups and as a result we are continuing to provide support to the vaccination programme through the Core Covid Team, Covid-19 ambassadors, Engagement and Integration Officers and Social Prescribing Link Workers.

Good ventilation has been a key factor in reducing transmission throughout the pandemic and the importance of adequate ventilation has been strengthened with continuing research into this area. A task and finish group, with representatives from key areas – Public Health, Schools, Public

Protection, Health & Safety and Property Services was established to look at how we could encourage and support ventilation in public buildings, high-risk areas and what support the Council could offer to the general public, local businesses and educational settings. Advice and guidance around ensuring adequate ventilation has been shared and ventilation has been a key part of any wider communications. An offer of CO2 monitors and advice on their use has also been made available across various settings.

A key function of the Core Covid team is to support Outbreak Management and a dedicated e-mail address was established for this purpose. It is monitored five days a week by a 'front door' team and this is stepped up to cover weekends and bank holidays when required for example, during the Delta and Omicron waves. There has been significant multi-agency work across the local authority and Lancashire Resilience Forum footprint to prevent and manage the risk of outbreaks in a range of high risk settings including;



Blackburn with Darwen Council along with NHS CCG colleagues have put in place 'designated settings' for COVID-19 care. These settings ensure that all people requiring admission to a care setting or back to their own care setting can be discharged from hospital safely, which helps to reduce the spread of the virus within other care settings. A designated setting allows the resident to undergo the necessary period of isolation, which could be up to 10 days.

Managing the risk of exposure and transmission in the workplace is key to ensuring not only the health of the workforce, but also the sustainability of the business, and the wider economic recovery. Locally, there is a multi-agency approach to workplace support and engagement comprising local authority public health and public protection teams, Public Health England and the Health and Safety Executive. The Local Authority has a key role in promoting and enforcing COVID-19-secure workplaces based on the five main steps to working safely set out in [Government guidance on working safely](#) during coronavirus. The COVID-19 [Resource Pack for Workplaces](#) has been developed collaboratively to provide clear advice and guidance to support businesses in managing their response to the situation; together with contact details for further information.

The Public Protection Team are responsible for working with businesses to promote COVID-19 secure practices, monitoring compliance and taking action where necessary. This includes close working with local business networks. A wide range of data are used to identify those workplaces that would benefit from further intervention and support, ranging from common exposure and postcode incidence alerts via the Public Health England hub to local grass roots intelligence via the local authorities.

The Resilience and Emergency Planning Service has been supporting the Council's response to the Covid-19 crisis. Having worked through repeated peaks and troughs of Covid-19 infection rates and consequential response from the Council and its partners; the Council endeavoured to

manage a phase where the ongoing Covid-19 response work was classed as enduring transmission and being embedded where appropriate into Business as Usual. The Service has throughout the pandemic worked with partners and supported various national, regional and local work streams and continues to do so whilst we are in the recovery phase. BwD has contributed to two Lancashire Local Resilience Forum and recommendations have been captured within the LRF Work Programme and rolled out across all partners. The ultimate aim is to still to maintain the necessary support to the community and BwD employees.

Following the review of the Corporate and Departmental Business Continuity Plans, a 'winter pressures' exercise was undertaken to examine the Council's approach to winter planning and Business Continuity. Service area leads were tasked with looking at their 'key functions' in the event that activity would need to be reduced or paused to ensure that priority services are supported if an enhanced operation response to Covid19 was required.

A Members Bulletin electronic communication was established early in the pandemic and this was replicated internally with Operational and Strategic reports which were published on alternate weeks to provide Corporate Leadership Team and Extended Leadership with a detailed breakdown of Covid-19 activity across the organisation. It also included details of planned activity and the latest statistics around vaccinations, case rates and outbreaks to ensure a cohesive approach to pandemic management. The reporting proved popular and engaging and was added to the Members Bulletin as an elected members Covid-19 report. Regular updates around Covid-19 activity continued to be provided via committee updates and council reports including Executive Board and Council Forum throughout the year.

Our workforce continues to be at the root of our success in our response. Staff have continued to be flexible and have adapted to new situations at pace, often providing a 24/7 service 24/7 service where needed. Redeployment was also required in the second year of Covid-19 response activity to ensure support to critical areas such as adult social care. Staff have continued with blended roles and stepped up their support when help was needed in particular during the winter crisis. The Human Resources team have continued to support redeployment and supported numerous staff into temporary Covid-19 response roles. This allowed us to adapt to changing demands and restrictions.

On each occasion in the past 12 months when government guidance has advised people to work from home, we have supported our staff to do this. Established digital support has been enhanced in the past 12 months of covid response and our office-based services have continued working throughout with staff moving to home-working or a blend of office/home working as required. Clinically extremely vulnerable staff were supported to work from home and redeployed where necessary. In addition, they were supported with their return to the office when the government's shielding programme ended.

The HR team's training provision was moved online during covid response and this proved extremely popular. Managers were also offered support via remote meetings throughout the lockdowns and working from home guidance. Two Covid-19 related courses were developed and the completion figures for these are below:

Infection and Prevention Awareness for Front Line Staff	6820
Prevent COVID-19	1668
Total	8488

The team also had to rapidly move from an entirely classroom based training delivery model for Adult Social Care to an online delivery model and this continued throughout the Delta and Omicron

waves. Relevant content was sourced quickly and information around these was communicated as a matter of urgency. The courses and completion figures for these are below:

Course name	Completed
Aphasia	263
Autism Awareness	791
Catheter Care	201
Dementia Awareness	460
Diabetes Awareness	400
Dysphagia Awareness	170
Epilepsy Awareness	596
Falls and Fracture Prevention in the Elderly	259
LGBT Aware for Care	121
Loss and Bereavement	1366
Managing Continence	148
Managing Stoma Care	143
Medication Awareness and Safe Handling of Medicines	540
Medication Practice	240
Medication Practice for Domiciliary Care	205
Moving and Positioning of Individuals	491
Palliative Care and End of Life Care	348
Parkinson's Disease Awareness	221
Stroke Awareness	245
Total	7208

5. NEXT STEPS

This is a report covering key activity from April 2021 to March 2022. A further report will be brought back to full council outlining the council's overall response to the covid pandemic, by the end of 2022.

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no policy implications.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Whilst there are no financial implications arising directly from the contents of this report, the impact of Covid-19 has resulted in significant financial implications for the Council and the Borough as a whole. Some of these matters are reported in the narrative above and others have been the subject of regular reports to the Executive and Council during the last financial year. Details of the financial impact of Covid-19 in 2021-22 will be included in the Council's Statement of Accounts as appropriate.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications.

9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no resource implications.

10. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision.

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision.

11. CONSULTATIONS

There are no consultations.

12. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

N/A

13. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

CONTACT OFFICER:	Mohsin Mulla
DATE:	9 th June 2022
BACKGROUND PAPER:	N/A