

North Lanarkshire Council Report

Policy and Strategy Committee

approval noting

Ref

Date 01/10/20

Council response to COVID-19

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Executive Summary

Over six months on from the national declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic, there is no doubt the impact has been intensely felt by many people and communities across North Lanarkshire. While the phased protection measures put in place nationally have helped to reduce mortality levels and suppress outbreaks, COVID-19 remains a threat with serious implications for people's health and wellbeing.

Notwithstanding the unprecedented challenges presented by COVID-19, the well-established local arrangements for emergency planning enabled an extremely fast paced and flexible response by the council to support the people, communities, and businesses of North Lanarkshire against that threat.

Many decisions made over the last six months by the Command structure (implemented in line with the council's Corporate Resilience Plan) have ensured the continuity of key services and the ongoing safety and wellbeing of service users and staff.

Decisions made were based on all known information available at the time, and were conducted within an ethical, legal, and risk proportionate framework. This allowed for the identification of increased demands and pressures being placed on services and consideration of appropriate responses, as well as ensuring effective partnership working with key stakeholders, particularly with those most directly impacted.

The processes and structures in place also facilitated an extensive range of internal and external communications and engagement. This included full interaction with Elected Members throughout - with weekly meetings between the Chief Executive and all party leaders covering updates on response activity and recovery proposals, 86 e-mail briefings, and fortnightly meetings nationally. Heads of Service / Executive Directors continued regular engagement with Committee Conveners providing service specific updates. The Chief Executive participated in a weekly meeting with all other councils' chief executives, weekly meetings were held with all Trade Unions, and the Lanarkshire Local Resilience Partnership met weekly.

To fulfil a commitment made by the Chief Executive, this report and its accompanying appendices provide Members with the conclusions following a desktop review of the council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic to date.

This review was structured around a set of criteria developed independently by the Improvement Service; it comprises 20 assessment statements across four sections - the

council's response to COVID19, governance of council during COVID-19, support for staff during COVID-19, and new ways of working.

It aims to capture lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic to support the council through the recovery and renewal planning processes, and to move to a platform of stability from which available resources can be redirected to fulfil the ambition set out in The Plan for North Lanarkshire.

Members will recall the shared ambition within The Plan for North Lanarkshire has a vision for inclusive growth and prosperity for all. This remains as relevant in the new environment as it was before. Even more so, given the impact of the pandemic on people who are in the most vulnerable situations.

Addressing the lessons learned that have been identified through this review, and using these to inform future ways of working, will allow a balance to be achieved between progressing many business as usual activities in line with the long-term vision and intentions laid out in The Plan for North Lanarkshire, while still ensuring appropriate (and improved) mechanisms are in place to implement the restrictions and actions required to respond to the ongoing threat of local COVID-19 outbreaks.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Policy and Strategy Committee:

- (1) Note the contents of this report and accompanying appendices,
- (2) Note the information presented in Appendix 2 which details the council's response to COVID-19 and forms the evidence base for the review of resilience planning undertaken using an independent assessment framework,
- (3) Note the conclusions in paragraph 2.8 summarising the council's response to COVID-19, and highlighting the lessons learned to be addressed in case of any second wave or significant outbreak, and to inform future ways of working,
- (4) Note the commitment made by the Chief Executive at the Council meeting on 13th August 2020, now fulfilled through this review, and
- (5) Note that Internal Audit will, as part of their 2020/21 Plan, seek to provide independent assurance on the adequacy and effectiveness of the council's resilience arrangements and its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of that review will be reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Panel in due course in line with the Internal Audit Charter.

The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority All priorities

Ambition statement All ambition statements

1. Background

- 1.1 With the escalation of COVID-19, and the World Health Organisation (WHO) declaration of a public health emergency of international concern on 30th January 2020, all public services began to review their resilience arrangements relevant to the potential of a significant outbreak of the virus within the UK.
- 1.2 As a Category 1 Responder (along with the emergency services, health authorities, and

the Scottish Environment Protection Agency), North Lanarkshire Council is obliged to fulfil a number of statutory duties in the event of an emergency. These are outlined in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (Contingency Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2005.

- 1.3 To ensure all council services were therefore as prepared as they could be for an outbreak, all Heads of Service reviewed their Business Continuity arrangements in February 2020. These arrangements were tested against a scenario relating to COVID-19 that included high levels of staff absence and increased demand for services, in order to determine the impact of a significant outbreak of the virus.
- 1.4 This response was implemented in line with the council's Corporate Resilience Plan and the four stages of dealing with an emergency detailed therein - Preparation, Response, Recovery, and Review. This early preparation enabled the council to be well placed for the next announcement.
- 1.5 The next announcement came on 11th March 2020, when the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic.
- 1.6 The emergency response structure (see Appendix 1), outlined in the Corporate Resilience Plan, was implemented immediately thereafter. This comprised:
 - Gold (strategic) - chaired by the Chief Executive and comprising the two Executive Directors, Chief Officer for Health and Social Care, and members of the Corporate Management Team - which held its first meeting on 13th March 2020.
 - Silver (tactical) - chaired by the strategic representative for resilience development, the Head of Regulatory Services and Waste Solutions - which held its first meeting on 16th March 2020.
 - The Bronze (operational) level of response, which is at service management level.
- 1.7 At the Special Meeting of the Council on 19th March 2020, it was agreed:
 - (1) that the Council was in an emergency situation due to COVID-19,
 - (2) that the Council endorsed the delegations already granted to the Chief Executive to take decisions, as required, in the event that meetings of the Council or its Committees require to be cancelled as a result of COVID-19, and
 - (3) that, in the absence of the Chief Executive, such delegation be given to Executive Directors and/or the Chief Officer, Health and Social Care, as appropriate
- 1.8 On 23rd March 2020 the country moved into lockdown and the Chief Executive confirmed to all Elected Members that all Council and Committee meetings were to be suspended with immediate effect and that all necessary decisions, which would normally be taken by a Committee, would now be dealt with under his delegated authority.
- 1.9 At the Council meeting on 13th August 2020, Members noted a report from the Head of Legal and Democratic Solutions which outlined the *Decision making process during the Covid-19 emergency*. This provided details of the decisions made by the Chief Executive in the period from 22nd March to 30th June 2020 under the delegated authority provided to him in the approved Scheme of Delegation to Officers, and confirmed by the Council at its Special Meeting on 19th March.
- 1.10 This report also outlined the process that was established through which Committee business was progressed during the emergency period. This included ensuring that Elected Members were able to effectively fulfil their role and governance responsibilities, and there was transparency in decision making throughout the

process.

- 1.11 A further recommendation noted at the Council meeting on 13th August was that the *“use of delegated authority by the Chief Executive will cease on 13th August 2020 but such authority remains available to the Chief Executive in any future emergency situations”*.
- 1.12 It was also noted at this meeting that the *“Corporate Management Team has agreed at its meeting held on 23rd June 2020 that, upon reaching Phase 4 of the Scottish Government’s Route Map to Recovery, it would undertake a review of resilience planning during the COVID-19 period and, thereafter report to the next available meeting of the Policy and Strategy Committee”*.
- 1.13 As at the time of writing this report, the country remains in Phase 3 of the Scottish Government’s *Route map through and out of the crisis* and it is considered that it may take some time to reach Phase 4. By that time the moment will have passed and there will be less benefit to be gained by the council, and the people and communities of North Lanarkshire, from identifying and addressing the lessons learned.
- 1.14 For this reason, this report and its accompanying appendices provide Members with the conclusions from a review of the council’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic as at September 2020. This fulfils the commitment made by the Chief Executive at the Council meeting on 13th August 2020 and ensures that the lessons learned can be addressed in a manner that is timely and which inform future ways of working.
- 1.15 Internal Audit will, as part of their 2020/21 Plan, seek to provide independent assurance on the adequacy and effectiveness of the council’s resilience arrangements and its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of that review will be reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Panel in due course in line with the Internal Audit Charter.

2. Review

Assessment process

- 2.1 To ensure a structured approach to the review and a set of assessment criteria that has been developed by an independent body, the Improvement Service’s toolkit (*COVID-19 - Capturing Learning at Corporate Level*) was used to assess the council’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is available to view on the website: https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0028/18793/C-19-Checklist-Capturing-Learning-at-Corporate-Level.pdf
- 2.2 The Improvement Service’s toolkit is one of a series of public sector self-evaluation style toolkits to capture learning from the COVID-19 pandemic and support councils through their recovery and renewal planning processes. This toolkit comprises 20 assessment statements across four sections:
 - A. Council response to COVID-19.
 - B. Governance of council during COVID-19.
 - C. Support for staff during COVID-19.
 - D. New ways of working.
- 2.3 Desktop research obtained evidence for each of the 20 assessment statements - this is presented in Appendix 2. This research included information from the council (and partner) websites, briefings and e-mail announcements, Gold and Silver Command

action logs, the *We Aspire* monthly newsletter, and a range of committee and management reports.

- 2.4 The statistics to support the evidence were provided by the respective council service for various media and management updates and, as such, were sourced from previously published information. As these were published at varying times throughout the last six months, subsequent verification of the figures was sought from Heads of Service.
- 2.5 To triangulate the evidence presented against each of the statements in Appendix 2, public feedback has been included where this has been available. This includes the headline results from the public survey (i.e. feedback on services continuing to be provided, satisfaction with the council's response to the pandemic, and how easy it was to find information and advice provided by the council), social media, and feedback from other organisations.
- 2.6 In addition, a facilitated session was held at a virtual Corporate Management Team meeting on 1st September 2020. This reflected on decision making and actions by the council during the response stage to COVID-19, considering what worked well, what did not work so well, and what lessons had been learned.
- 2.7 While carrying out the desktop research against each of the 20 assessment statements and writing up the evidence sourced, it was considered that the evidence against *statement 2* cross references with *statements 3, 4, and 5*. For this reason these statements have been merged together for ease of reading and to avoid duplicating the same information.

Summary of evidence

- 2.8 In conclusion, a summary of the information presented in Appendix 2 is noted below.

2.8.1 A. Council response to COVID-19

The council's Corporate Resilience Plan, and Business Continuity Plans, are well established and provided a sound framework to enable the council to respond promptly and flexibly to the COVID-19 pandemic, while maintaining the provision of critical frontline care, supports, and services and enabling the ongoing safety and wellbeing of service users and staff.

Key partnerships and relationships were already well established, and these have enabled a wide range of services and supports for those most vulnerable in North Lanarkshire's communities. While the resilience framework enabled integration with partners and other responders in response to the priorities, including providing emergency support to communities, it was considered that the council could have picked up on some specific partnership and pan-Lanarkshire opportunities from the very outset. In addition, more targeted briefings would have been beneficial for key community anchor organisations.

Communications were extensive in terms of the range, volume, and frequency of information, guidance, and advice that was shared internally with staff and Elected Members and externally with the public. In this respect, the lesson learned to be addressed involves more of a formal structure to internal communications, as well as improving communication and feedback from the bottom up, and identifying any gaps in terms of communications with specific service users and the public.

2.8.2 B. Governance of council during COVID-19

The emergency response structure implemented in line with the Corporate Resilience Plan enabled a command, control, and communication response to COVID-19. This ensured that decision making which is out of the ordinary (i.e. different from business as usual), was carried out in a timely and co-ordinated way. It considered the implications of decision making for council services, partners, the public, and internal and external communications and provided a governance framework for decision making to ensure consistency and best practice for incident response. Moving forward, setting out more formally the relationship between Gold Command, the Corporate Management Team, and the Recovery Group (in terms of the functions of the groups) is considered an improvement action required to help avoid any potential overlap.

During the six months, many risks on the corporate risk register were reviewed to identify and re-assess those most likely to be negatively impacted by COVID-19 and the associated changing risk environment. Health and safety and financial sustainability were among those risks that were reviewed to update the current key controls regarded as being effective in mitigating the risk, and identify the planned actions to mitigate the risk further. In terms of financial management and sustainability, a monitoring process was established from the outset to record the financial impact of the council's response to COVID-19. A new corporate risk - *Pandemic Illness - COVID-19* - was developed and added to the corporate risk register.

The risk to the council of not being able to operate due to the absence of effective decision making was considered significant, not only because of the potential financial impact on the organisation, but also given the considerable impact on service delivery and the ability to meet new and/or additional legislative requirements and expectations. As a result, endorsement of delegations (already granted to the Chief Executive under the Scheme of Delegation to Officers) was approved by Council in advance of any situation arising where Committee meetings may have to be cancelled.

Lessons learned in this respect focus not on the recording of decisions which were carried out in line with the requirements of the Corporate Resilience Plan, but on more consistent recording of formal internal and external engagement with Elected Members and other stakeholders to ensure a collective understanding. Linking to information already contained within the Corporate Resilience Plan and the Scheme of Delegation to Officers, a future consideration is the identification of how delegated decisions will operate in practice.

2.8.3 C. Support for staff during COVID-19

Supporting the physical and mental wellbeing of the workforce remained a critical consideration as the council responded to the outbreak. Protecting staff, and enabling them to stay healthy, is vital for their own wellbeing and to be able to continue to deliver vital services to the people and communities of North Lanarkshire.

The types of supports put in place included PPE to protect staff while they are at work (and the people they are assisting), the provision of considerable guidance and advice through *myNL*, a dedicated health and wellbeing page on the website, health and safety announcements, webinars, hints and tips for remote working, and free packed lunches.

Ongoing engagement with the Trade Unions, and between managers and their teams and individual employees, ensured the provision of 1:1 support where required. Staff have also been supported with occupational health requirements through DSE self-assessment processes.

An independent survey gathered feedback on how staff felt they were coping; this feedback is being used to determine other wellbeing support that can be offered.

Lessons learned relate to awareness raising of staff in terms of their role in the resilience response process, and in understanding the chain of command in such circumstances. This would have improved their understanding of the decisions that had been made and what they were being asked to do.

2.8.4 D. New ways of working

Notwithstanding the fast-paced response of the council and partners in response to COVID-19, many new ways of working were adapted during the six months and implemented quickly to ensure the continued provision of critical care, supports, and services. The introduction and enhancement of many new digital innovations facilitated these adaptations.

The session held with the Corporate Management Team provided time for some self-reflection and the main lessons learned have been summarised in paragraphs 2.8.1, 2.8.2, and 2.8.3 above and captured in section D (*statement 20*) of Appendix 2.

Next steps

- 2.8 The next stage of recovery for council services is the subject of a separate report at this Committee - *COVID-19 Recovery and Renewal Plan*. The finalisation of this recovery plan, and its accompanying operating model, moves the council to a platform of stability from which available resources can be redirected to fulfil the ambition set out in The Plan for North Lanarkshire.
- 2.9 The *Programme of Work for 2020 and beyond* (approved at Policy and Strategy Committee in March 2020) and the detailed elements presented to Members on that day which focus on the programme of place-based investment, remain the clear vision for the council. This aims to address the range of different and complex economic, social, and health issues that exist at a local level - issues which have been exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19 - and achieve change that is sustainable in the longer-term.

3. Equality and Diversity

3.1 Fairer Scotland Duty

There is no requirement to carry out a Fairer Scotland Duty assessment on this report; no new decisions are being made.

3.2 Equality Impact Assessment

There is no requirement to carry out an equality impact assessment on this report; no new decisions are being made.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial impact

The financial impact of the council's response to, and recovery from, the COVID-19 pandemic was reported to the Council meeting on 13th August 2020, <https://mars.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/egenda/images/att94334.pdf>

4.2 HR/Policy/Legislative impact

The Coronavirus Act 2020, an Act of the UK Parliament, came into force on 25th March 2020 and introduced a wide range of provisions aimed at tackling the spread of coronavirus in the UK. Subsequently the Scottish Government introduced the

Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020, which contained substantial further powers and measures to ensure the continuation of essential public services throughout the coronavirus outbreak. The Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 came into force on 7th April.

On 11th May 2020 the Scottish Government introduced a second Bill, the Coronavirus (Scotland) (No.2) Bill (“the Bill”). The purpose of the Bill was to make further changes to the way essential public services operate; to provide more support for business and to assist central and local government and health and social care services to respond effectively to the coronavirus outbreak. The Bill was passed as an Act by the Parliament on 20th May 2020. It received Royal Assent on 26th May 2020 and came into force on 27th May 2020.

Section 9 of the Act provides that Part 1 of the Act will expire on 30th September 2020, unless the Scottish Parliament approves regulations providing for its continuation until 31st March 2021. If the Scottish Parliament does approve such regulations, it may then approve further regulations allowing one further, final extension until 30th September 2021, at which point any remaining provisions in the Act will expire. These are the same dates as set out in section 12 of the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020, meaning that all legislation has the same maximum expiry date.

4.3 **Environmental impact**

There is no environmental impact arising from this report.

4.4 **Risk impact**

An update on the council’s risk management developments in 2020 to date, including progress on reviewing, assessing, and managing risks contained within the council’s corporate risk register was considered by the Audit and Scrutiny Panel on 3rd September 2020, <https://mars.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/egenda/images/att94471.pdf>.

The report also advised how the council has responded to COVID-19 in terms of risk management, and the resulting impacts on key corporate risks and the council’s risk profile.

5. **Measures of success**

- 5.1 In the short to medium-term, ensuring that the assessment of the council’s response to COVID-19 and lessons learned therein are addressed in case of any second wave or significant outbreak, and to inform future ways of working.
- 5.2 Ensuring the ongoing robustness and effectiveness of the council’s resilience arrangements (as and when these are needed).
- 5.3 In the longer-term, measures of success will be evidenced through progress being made against the agreed Programme of Work that aims to deliver upon the ambition statements in The Plan for North Lanarkshire.
- 5.4 This will in turn lead to evidence that these activities are having a positive impact on inclusive growth and prosperity for the people and communities of North Lanarkshire in order to realise the shared ambition where North Lanarkshire is the place to *Live, Learn, Work, Invest, and Visit*.

6. **Supporting documents**

- 6.1 Appendix 1: North Lanarkshire Council Corporate Resilience Plan - Emergency

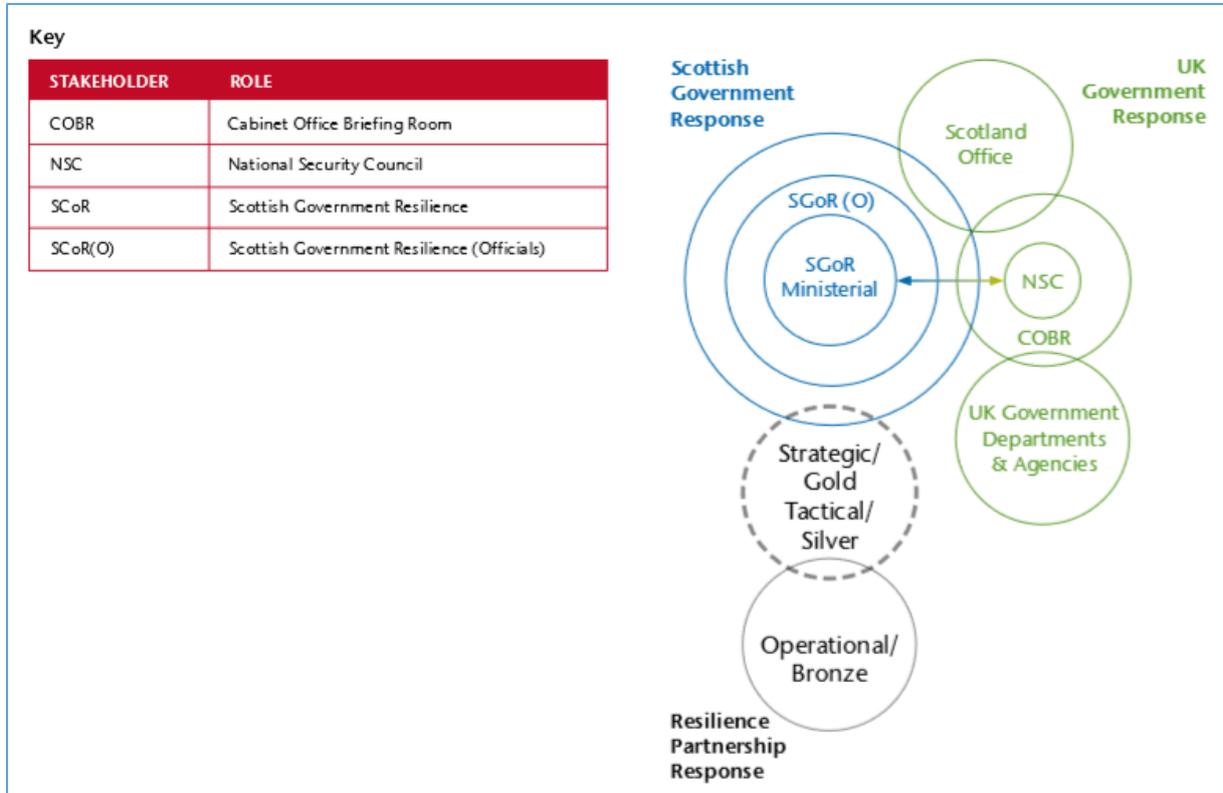
response structure
Appendix 2: Review of North Lanarkshire Council's response to COVID-19 and
lessons learned

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'DM', written in a cursive style.

Des Murray
Chief Executive

North Lanarkshire Council - Corporate Resilience Plan

Emergency response structure



Review of North Lanarkshire Council's response to COVID-19 and lessons learned

As at September 2020

A. Council response to COVID-19

1. The council can evidence examples of how it has worked well in response to COVID-19.

As a Category 1 Responder (along with the emergency services, health authorities, and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency) local authorities have a duty to maintain plans on how to continue to perform normal functions while responding to emergencies. The council's long-established Corporate Resilience Plan forms a sound basis for the level of response that was required from the COVID-19 emergency.

This response began with Preparation - the first of the four stages (Preparation, Response, Recovery, and Review) of dealing with an emergency. In this respect each service has a well-established Business Continuity Plan which outlines how the council will prioritise and maintain service delivery. Heads of Service began reviewing these arrangements in February 2020.

By 18th March, all had tested their Business Continuity Plans against a scenario relating to COVID-19, including high levels of staff absences and increased demand for service (where appropriate) in order to determine the impact of a significant outbreak of the virus.

The Corporate Resilience Plan contains a well-rehearsed and understood command structure which the council stood up very early on, before the country went into lockdown; the first Gold meeting was held on 13th March, followed by the first Silver meeting on 16th March.

One of the first decisions made by Gold Command, in line with the objectives of the Corporate Resilience Plan, was to facilitate the provision of as many essential frontline services as possible; some examples are listed below (with figures as at July):

- North Lanarkshire was one of a very few councils to keep a full kerbside waste collection, allowing residents to continue to dispose of all their waste as usual.
- 693,110 home care visits were undertaken over the three-month lockdown period alone to ensure North Lanarkshire's most vulnerable people were looked after.
- 830 meals were delivered every week to sheltered housing residents, racking up a total of over 13,000 meals during lockdown.
- Key worker hubs were in operation in some areas from week 1, allowing parents working in the frontline of essential services, including the NHS, to get to work.
- This provision then extended to 10 hubs providing support to the children of key workers from Monday to Friday (and at the 3 central hubs on a Saturday and Sunday) for early year's children, primary and secondary aged children, and young people. In total this provided essential childcare to over 31,000 children and young people.
- While schools across the country were forced to close, figures from GLOW indicate that around 67% of North Lanarkshire's children and young people were plugged in and online doing home learning over the lockdown period.
- Even during lockdown, tenants' still received emergency repairs to their homes where required - contractors carried out 5,670 emergency gas works, 2,698 empty house works, 10,567 emergency repairs, and 2,995 routine works to date.
- Ensuring support for those most vulnerable meant processing 472 homeless applications and providing 164 permanent lets to homeless people. Over 100 new properties were identified as new temporary accommodation to meet this demand.

A public survey was conducted during August to understand how residents have been affected by a range of issues linked to COVID-19; almost 2,700 responses were received overall. The most notable feedback on frontline services which continued to be delivered was for kerb-side waste collection services where almost three quarters of respondents rated the service positively.

- 2. The council has collaborated in new and different ways with partners in response to COVID-19.**
- 3. The council can evidence examples of how resources were used to best support hard to reach individuals and communities during COVID-19.**
- 4. The council can evidence examples of positive working with the Third Sector in response to COVID-19.**
- 5. The council can evidence how it targeted support during COVID-19 through community engagement.**

The community planning partnership is well established through the North Lanarkshire Partnership (NLP) where the council, Police Scotland, NHS Lanarkshire, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, and Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire (VANL) are all active partners on the NLP Strategic Partnership Board.

At the commencement of the pandemic the Lanarkshire Local Resilience Partnership was also stood up and met on a weekly basis. This partnership brings together all emergency, public, and voluntary services across Lanarkshire, and allowed a structured and consistent response to the pandemic at a pan-Lanarkshire level.

The Corporate Resilience Plan establishes the framework within which the council, partners, and other responders integrate in response to the priorities, this includes providing emergency support to the community.

The provision of emergency support for the most vulnerable individuals and communities embodies the one council approach prevalent in recent years, and the base planning assumptions developed by Gold Command which were applied throughout the pandemic. One assumption, in particular, relates to council wide resources, i.e. *“Staffing resources across the council are viewed as a common resource and any employees not able to be actively employed are automatically placed within a pool resource available for use by any service area.”* A workforce profiling exercise carried out across council services and partner agencies, co-ordinated by the Silver Command, ensured adherence to this assumption by identifying any areas of capacity to address gaps in critical services which required additional support.

Supporting the most vulnerable

As reported in *We Aspire* (April), one of the most significant and important services created in response to the pandemic was a dedicated local Community Assistance helpline targeted at the most vulnerable people in North Lanarkshire’s communities.

While this helpline predominantly provided support for those residents who had to shield, call handlers also helped other vulnerable people with the provision of health-related information and advice and referrals for services (such as social work or financial assistance).

In developing and maintaining the Community Assistant helpline, staff from across the council (housing, enterprise and communities, and business solutions) worked together to very quickly set up the helpline with supporting database and referrals process. Key achievements include the following:

- Quickly mobilising telephony systems to allow targeted calls to those on the NHS lists identified as being in vulnerable categories. North Lanarkshire Council was the first council to introduce both inbound and outbound calls in this respect. In early April a national hotline number was announced by the Scottish Government; this then directed calls straight to the

local authority the caller resided in.

- Redeploying staff from various council services into a temporary Supporting People team to address the immediate shielding response. Operating the helpline, this team provided an inbound and outbound call service to people looking for help, personally calling residents on the shielding list.
- Utilising the experience of the DigitalNL systems integrator partner (Agilisys), the council became the first in Scotland to stand up the Helping Hands system (on 27th April) to co-ordinate shielding support. This digital system tracked the outreach support provided to residents and the specific needs of each.
- Following the two weeks after implementation, over 5,000 back records were entered into the system to aid the call handling process. Over 200 contact agents were trained and reports for the team delivering solutions were developed, tested, and run daily. Council representatives acted in an advisory capacity for the national group and a reference point for other Scottish local authorities implementing Helping Hands.
- The implementation of the Community Assistance helpline brought about 12,726 calls to people on the shielding list and saw the delivery of 6,408 food packages, with 1,337 pharmacy prescriptions collected and delivered, and 1,146 referrals made to other support services including the NHS, social work, and the financial inclusion team.
- Linking the data from Helping Hands to the GIS support team to build interactive maps and identify local services, such as shops, pharmacies, and community hubs, along with opening times and support numbers for communities.

Volunteering

VANL have played a key role in making sure the most vulnerable people have the support they need, this included aiding the referral process from the Community Assistance helpline (with wellbeing and befriending calls, shopping, and deliveries of food, medicines, and other essential items, as well as the provision of free food where needed), and facilitating local response teams. Many existing community and voluntary organisations adapted their normal activities to provide support to their service users and wider communities and new COVID-19 community groups were established.

As reported in *We Aspire* (May), the council, NHS, and VANL worked closely with local community anchor organisations to support individuals and communities most in need during the outbreak. Building on existing strong relationships, the partnership produced guidance for community groups on issues such as PPE and risk assessments, and assisted in terms of sharing resources, co-ordinating referrals, and securing funding.

Over the initial three-month lockdown period, VANL facilitated a total of 39,650 calls to people across North Lanarkshire, of which 19,015 were befriending calls and 20,635 wellbeing calls, with 38,720 food shopping deliveries made by volunteers, 9,258 meals delivered, 941 medication supplies dropped off, and 10,640 other tasks carried out (including dog walking).

Over 50 young people volunteered as youth leaders across the summer community hubs. Many of these young people were facing their own challenges with regards to mental health, loneliness and isolation, food insecurity, and difficult home circumstances. Being a volunteer enabled community learning and development youth work staff to continue to provide vital support, access to training and accreditation, and work experience for the young people. The young volunteers worked alongside a further 47 adult volunteers who were recruited through the Scotland Cares Initiative and VANL.

Public feedback

As reported in *We Aspire* (August), a survey of around 550 people who were shielding, and had engaged with the Community Assistance Helpline, revealed that 82% felt they were coping.

- 49% of respondents said they received a food box, when shielding, thanks to the helpline.
- Almost a third received a medication delivery and the team arranged a GP or hospital appointment for 15% of respondents.

- The majority of those who were asked if there was anything else the support team could have done said they were happy with the service.

Feedback from a wider public survey conducted during August showed that 70% of respondents said they received the help they needed during lockdown, i.e. assistance with medication or groceries.

Financial support for residents

During the pandemic, welfare rights officers, income maximisers, and debt advisors in the financial inclusion team have been on-hand to provide a range of help and advice to support residents struggling with money worries as the financial impact of the pandemic takes its toll.

With the usual face to face meetings (involving talking people through the process and helping them to complete forms) no longer possible due to physical distancing, processing these referrals required development of a new approach for staff working remotely to ensure residents receive the help and benefits they are entitled to; this new approach included the prioritisation of referrals.

During the six months, the team received 3,029 referrals made for debt and income maximisation advice, which included 1,010 food referrals, and 1,743 for advice, as well as assisting with over 500 benefit claims.

The council also facilitated the provision of a wide range of other financial supports, this included:

- Helping to process 5,062 successful awards (community and crisis), through the Scottish Welfare Fund, from March to date.
- Processing 1,369 successful applications (for people eligible for a council tax reduction) from the start of lockdown until mid-June, with an estimated further 400 successful applications to be progressed to date.
- Ensuring that more than £200,000 has been awarded to 540 tenants from the Rent Relief Fund, which was set up specifically to provide temporary support to council tenants who are worried about rent arrears during the pandemic and are struggling to make their rent payments. The average award has been in the region of £370 which equates to five weeks' rent. Up to £300,000 of funding is available to help eligible tenants whose financial circumstances have been disrupted due to COVID-19 and those who have been made redundant, furloughed, had their hours reduced, or are self-employed.
- Helping 1,809 tenants with financial assistance of almost £685,000 from the Universal Credit Fund, which was set up in March this year.

Support for businesses in the local community

During lockdown many businesses shut down, impacting on livelihoods and the economy. As a result, a range of government measures were put in place to support businesses and individuals - these included grants for certain businesses which councils were asked to administer. The scheme closed to new applications on 10th July.

As reported to the Finance and Resources Committee on 24th September, the revenues team along with enterprise and communities processed 4,672 applications, made 3,870 awards, and ensured the provision of £41.6m in financial assistance for local businesses.

Among the enquiries some businesses took the time to e-mail their appreciation to the team, one business e-mailed to say "*Thank you to you and all your colleagues at this time doing a very difficult job but what you are doing collectively is helping businesses like me who has had no income whatsoever for a month now*".

A one-stop web page was developed to provide information that enabled local businesses to reopen safely and start the recovery process for the local economy. In particular, there is a

dedicated page to assist bars, cafes, and restaurants access the relevant temporary licences to open outdoor spaces.

As reported in *We Aspire* (June), supporting the local business community has been a priority, with the enterprise team working hard to help companies severely impacted by the pandemic. 1,034 business enquiries from 937 unique businesses were dealt with between 16 March and 30 April; 57% of these came in the first two weeks of lockdown.

In addition, the council successfully applied the non-domestic rates relief changes introduced by the Scottish Government. This essentially applied a rate poundage freeze to all businesses, and the retail, hospitality, and leisure relief scheme to all qualifying local businesses.

Trading standards and environmental health services played, and continue to play, a critical role in ensuring that businesses are able to open and operate in a way that mitigates against any risks associated with COVID-19, ensuring that the economy continues to recover and grow. Since 1st April, the team has dealt with over 1,500 complaints, enquiries, and investigations, as well as proactively giving bespoke advice and guidance to businesses in various sectors, such as retail and hospitality.

Supplier payments

The council put in place arrangements to provide financial support to a range of key suppliers so they were better able to cope with the crisis. This also aimed to ensure suppliers were in a position to resume normal service delivery, and fulfil their contractual obligations, when the pandemic was over and/or economic activity could be stepped back up.

These arrangements recognised that the council clearly has a wider interest in the economic health of North Lanarkshire and a specific interest in ensuring that once the current immediate crisis was over, suppliers were in place to deliver the goods and services that were required post-crisis. The arrangements adopted were in line with Scottish Government and COSLA guidance and were designed to secure intended outcomes while ensuring best value.

Supporting People team

The Supporting People team was originally established as a temporary measure to address the immediate shielding response required. Having successfully fulfilled this resource need, the team has subsequently been developed into a single point of contact for all support responses relevant to the pandemic.

Following the introduction of the Test and Protect policy across Scotland on 28th May, and as it is anticipated that this response will last for up to 24 months (and possibly longer), this team become an established element of the overall recovery process for the council.

In addition to the Test and Protect responsibility, the team continues to provide a pharmacy delivery service and, more recently, has supported calls from parents in the lead up to the reopening of schools on a phased basis from 11th August.

Care homes

One of the greatest areas of focus with local partners has been around supporting the care home sector, covering key areas of work such as:

- Testing, outbreak management, and ongoing surveillance.
- Infection, prevention, and control (including PPE and cleaning requirements).
- Education and training.
- Supportive reviews and visits.
- Workforce requirements and supply of mutual aid.

A pan-Lanarkshire Care Home Assurance Group was established on 23rd April and has been expanded to include Nurse Directors, Chief Social Work Officers, Chief Officers, Medical

Directors, and the Care Inspectorate. The group has undertaken a thematic analysis of care homes, identifying support needs around access to updated Health Protection Scotland (HPS) guidance, management of outbreaks, standard infection prevention and control measures, and staff support around mental health and wellbeing.

In addition, there has been expansion of a range of support services including social work quality assurance, care home liaison, health protection, senior nursing leadership, and infection, prevention, and control.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

One of the biggest challenges during the early phases of the pandemic was the supply of PPE to frontline staff. The national guidance has evolved over time and supplies to frontline staff have been maintained, both within the council and more widely across the independent social care sector.

In conjunction with Trade Union colleagues, a joint statement was agreed and released on 10th April. In conjunction with NHS Lanarkshire, all staff moved to table 4 of the Public Health Scotland guidance on 1st May, which removed the need for staff to undertake risk assessments and instead advised the use of full PPE at all times if unable to maintain physical distancing. This guidance was rolled out across all health and social care staff at the same time, ensuring there was no hierarchy in PPE provision.

Contact tracing

As the Test and Protect response became live across Scotland, in North Lanarkshire the initial contact tracing element of this response is led by NHS Lanarkshire and based at Kirklands Hospital. The council committed resources to support this local response which will remain in place until such times as the national contact tracing centre for Scotland is established.

A pan-Lanarkshire Test and Protect Steering Group was also established to allow regular communication between councils and the NHS contact tracing team.

Further, and in order to ensure that the ongoing outbreaks are capable of being effectively managed and those affected properly supported, a revised Incident Management Team model has been developed which allows effective co-operation across all relevant services. Funding for this model has been confirmed by the Scottish Government and is to be provided as an example of best practice throughout the country.

To reduce the impact and spread of any COVID positive cases within the council area and beyond, the environmental health service continues to work in close partnership with NHS Lanarkshire's Public Health team as part of the overall Test and Protect response.

Free school meals support

Providing support to those who need it most has always been a priority for the council. From March to June, 203,415 £20 food vouchers were redeemed by families on low income, or who are universally eligible for free school meals.

This commitment carried on over the summer holidays and £15 vouchers continued to be sent to those who met the revenues and benefits criteria for free school meal entitlement; 55,783 vouchers were redeemed over July and August.

6. The council can evidence a consistent and co-ordinated approach to providing communities with advice and guidance around COVID-19, such as mental health and wellbeing support.

As stated in the Corporate Resilience Plan, in a time of emergency the council is required to communicate and share information with a host of internal and external stakeholders including employees and the community. As such, the council executed multiple complex campaigns

across a range of channels for disparate audiences.

Community advice

A dedicated page on the council's website was set up for the provision of advice and information for communities and those shielding. This includes what to do if help is needed, how to become a community volunteer, ways to help vulnerable and elderly neighbours, domestic abuse advice and support, information for kinship carers, helplines for mental health and stress, support for older and younger people, ways for businesses to help, and how to get information translated into 21 different languages.

Coronavirus advice for residents and businesses

Digital platforms were fundamental to communicate service changes due to their fast, relevant, and interactive nature, and a dedicated web page and various social media channels were utilised to maximise reach. The dedicated web page (<https://www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/coronavirus>) is designed to reflect the latest national advice and guidance and communicate key decisions to the public about service delivery. Content includes service updates, advice for businesses, money advice, advice for parents, and consumer advice, for example:

- The latest health advice and links to the NHS website (www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus) and Scottish Government health guidance and support resources.
- A wide range of links to health and wellbeing information, such as signposts to information, resources, and supports on managing anxiety, NHS24 contact details, contact details of specific organisations (e.g. Health and Wellness Hub, Time for Talking, Age Scotland, and the Samaritans), and tips for carers (including information for children and young people as well as older people).
- Signposting of resources for carers (e.g. the Carers UK coronavirus guidance information, Young Scot for information and mental health support for young carers, SAMH guide, and Scottish Government advice and guidance for unpaid carers, highlighting the importance of having an emergency plan in place in case the main carer becomes ill).

All the council's established social media channels were heavily utilised as part of the execution of the communications strategy. As an example, the average post reach for the council's primary Facebook page throughout the period has been 200,000 per week, with significant weeks in respect of events (such as the start of lockdown and return to schools) achieving a post reach per week in excess of 2 million. Engagement with the council's social media content has consistently been significantly higher than engagement with neighbouring local authorities.

Business-specific communications were established to ensure businesses were aware of grants and other assistance available to them. All business support available nationally was added to a rolling list of support which business could access through the website.

A dedicated mailbox was established for all Elected Members' enquiries. This enabled enquiries to be co-ordinated and directed to the appropriate officer to deal with.

The council facilitated multiple bids from national broadcast media to showcase changes to how services were being delivered, including features on staff volunteering to work in different service areas in response to the virus. The communications and campaigns team continued to maintain a full press office function throughout.

Results from the public survey conducted during August showed that 67% of respondents found it easy to understand and access information about the virus. The most common channel to access information on council services was the website. When asked about how well-informed people were by the council in terms of the virus, 71% responded positively.

7. The council is capturing learning and good practice around COVID-19 to help

shape future service delivery, e.g. case studies to share learning.

In terms of sharing learning, the council has contributed to the Improvement Service's work to build up a collection of case studies. This aims to show how councils have rapidly redesigned services, created innovative solutions to new problems, and collaborated with communities and other organisations in responding to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. These case studies are published on the Improvement Service website:

<https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/covid-19-support-for-councils/covid-19-good-council-practice>

As well as highlighting good practice and showing the range of work being carried out by local authorities, these case studies are designed to allow councils to see what others are doing to feed into their own response.

Activities highlighting North Lanarkshire Council's response to COVID-19 are sited as good practice on 11 occasions. These are listed below, as extracted from the Improvement Service website:

Supporting vulnerable residents

- (1) Hot meals delivered to sheltered housing residents.
- (2) Domestic abuse video.
- (3) Community assistance helpline.

Digital solutions

- (4) Taking learning online in North Lanarkshire.
- (5) Helping Hands.

Health and social care

- (6) North Lanarkshire makes cooking easy peasy.

Children and young people

- (7) Continued access to free period products.
- (8) North Lanarkshire Big Camp Out.
- (9) Ensuring children are fed during COVID-19.

Personal protective equipment

- (10) Lanarkshire social enterprise supplying laundry bags to NHS staff.

Finance and economy

- (11) Rent relief fund.

B. Governance of council during COVID-19

8. The council has provided effective leadership during COVID-19.

Command, control, and communication response

Following the announcement on 11th March 2020, when the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic, the council's emergency response structure was implemented (in line with the Corporate Resilience Plan). This comprised:

- Gold (strategic) - chaired by the Chief Executive and comprising the two Executive Directors, Chief Officer for Health and Social Care, and members of the Corporate Management Team - which held its first meeting on 13th March.
- Silver (tactical) - chaired by the strategic representative for resilience development, the Head of Regulatory Services and Waste Solutions - which held its first meeting on 16th March.

- The Bronze (operational) level of response, which is at service management level.

Gold Command adopted the principles of a command, control, and communication response to COVID-19. This ensured that decision making which is out of the ordinary (i.e. different from business as usual) was carried out in a timely and co-ordinated way. It takes into account the implications of decision making for council services, partners, the public, and internal and external communications. It provides a governance framework for decision making to ensure consistency and best practice for incident response.

Decisions by Gold, Silver, and Bronze Command focussed on:

- Measures to ensure continuity of key services.
- Actions to address workforce attendance, safety, and well-being.
- Actions to address the safety and wellbeing of service users.
- The identification of increased demands and pressures being placed on services and consideration of appropriate responses.
- Actions to ensure effective communication with Elected Members, staff, service users, and the wider public.
- Ensuring effective partnership working with key stakeholders, particularly with those most directly impacted (e.g. NHS, care sector, community and voluntary sectors).
- Effectively addressing short-term financial governance issues that will arise, while also ensuring the longer-term financial sustainability of the council.
- Ensuring that the council was well placed to enter the recovery phase of the pandemic.

Membership of Gold Command included Heads of Service that have a critical role in terms of ensuring governance and mitigating risks around financial management and sustainability, organisational development, communications and all envisaged improvements in line with resources and compliance with legislation, i.e. financial solutions, people and organisational development, strategic communications, and legal and democratic solutions.

Gold Command meetings were initially placed in diaries for 9am every day, including weekends as it was important to have place holders in diaries for meetings. To avoid the risk of having all members of the group together at the one-time, initial meetings took place by a dedicated conference call line. This progressed to the use of Webex as technology became available.

The process in place meant that Silver Command meetings took place after Gold Command meetings so that information could be cascaded, and appropriate action taken by the group. The strategic representative for resilience development attended both Gold and Silver Command meetings to ensure consistency of message, the appropriate dissemination of information and instructions, and escalation of issues for action.

In line with the requirements of the Corporate Resilience Plan both Gold and Silver Command meetings maintained an Issues / Action Log to record all decisions made during meetings; this also contained the officer responsible for implementing the action and the *due by* date. A RAG system was used to monitor completed actions. As per the Corporate Resilience Plan, the information contained in incident logs requires to be maintained in order to "*inform the preparation of reports to strategic management and may also be scrutinised in any subsequent inquiry, criminal investigation, or corporate action*".

National direction and advice

A key role of the Gold, Silver, Bronze Command structure was monitoring and responding to the national (UK and Scottish Government) direction, advice, and policies cascaded to local government to implement in practice.

Feedback from the Corporate Management Team session on 1st September highlighted that national inputs were released very quickly, came in abundance, often had tight timescales for

implementation, and required much interpretation in order to clearly illustrate the actions that needed to be taken in order to operationalise particular guidance. A good example of this was the plethora of guidance around PPE - which was very quickly interpreted and turned into practical solutions on the ground - and ordering stocks to avoid running out.

Legislation changes

The Coronavirus Act 2020 came into force on 25th March 2020, the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 on 7th April, and the Coronavirus (Scotland) (No.2) Act on 27th May.

Much of this legislation came into force with immediate effect and introduced measures which were to be implemented in the event of an outbreak of COVID-19. These are designed as temporary measures directed specifically at allowing a flexible public health response during an outbreak. The legislation will have a limited life of two years which may be extended if necessary. The measures include new statutory powers and duties applicable to public authorities and can be categorised as follows:

- a) Measures to enhance the capacity and flexible deployment of staff.
- b) Relaxation of regulatory requirements in specific areas.
- c) Enhanced public health measures designed to contain the virus or slow its spread.
- d) Measures designed to deal with more deaths than would normally be the case.
- e) Measures to collect information necessary to deal with disruption to the food supply chain.

To mitigate for the fast-paced implementation of new legislation, and the speed at which this required to be introduced, legal services proactively produced a series of briefing notes summarising the provisions of the new Acts relevant to local authorities. These specifically highlighted legislative changes which impacted on service provision to allow the Gold, Silver, and Bronze Command structures to act accordingly.

Health and Social Care Partnership

As reported to the Adult Health and Social Care Committee on 8th September, command structures in NHS Lanarkshire were immediately put in place following the WHO announcement on 11th March. Gold Command groups were led by Directors and Silver and Bronze subgroups were in place to drive developments and implementation. Both have now stood down but will be stood back up, as required, should a second wave take place.

The Health and Social Care Partnership fully participated in both the command structures for the NHS and North Lanarkshire Council. This supported a co-ordinated approach across the whole system. In addition, the Lanarkshire Local Resilience Partnership has supported cross-agency developments.

The Health and Social Care Partnership held daily calls for key operational and professional leads to co-ordinate activity and log all decisions taken. In addition, weekly conference calls were held with each of the main contractor groups (e.g. care homes, self-directed support providers, and home support providers) to co-ordinate activity.

Financial monitoring

An early decision by Gold Command was the implementation of a monitoring process to record the financial impact of the council's response to COVID-19. This was subsequently reported to the Council meeting on 13th August. The focus of this report was to advise of the forecast financial position of the General Fund and the impact of the council's response to, and recovery from, the COVID-19 pandemic.

Joint statements

The well-established extent of partnership working across North Lanarkshire, and with services throughout the council, facilitated the issuing of many joint statements across the various organisations. This helped to reinforce a consistent message.

One example of a joint statement from the council, North Lanarkshire Health and Social Care Partnership, GMB, Unison, and Unite included a collective commitment to the UK wide guidance on the use of PPE.

Risk management

A report to the Audit and Scrutiny Panel on 3rd September provided an update on risk management developments including progress on reviewing, assessing, and managing risks contained within the council's corporate risk register. This included how the council has responded to COVID-19 in terms of risk management, and the resulting impacts on key corporate risks, and the council's risk profile.

This report advised that significant attention over the six months has been focused on identifying and re-assessing those corporate risks most likely to be negatively impacted by COVID-19 and the associated changing risk environment.

A new corporate risk was added to the corporate risk register in March - *Pandemic Illness - COVID-19*; this addresses the risk that the council is not prepared or able to provide an adequate response in the event of an outbreak of COVID-19 that ensures the continued delivery of critical services, fulfils the legal obligations under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, and protects as far as possible the safety and wellbeing of staff and service users.

Work to develop this new risk identified a range of current key management controls already in place; this included the well-established service business continuity plans, setting up the command structure of the Corporate Resilience Plan, close alignment with NHS Lanarkshire to ensure those critical service areas are assisted where possible (which in turn will see a reduced impact on council services), and liaising with all relevant groups / bodies / partnerships, including the Scottish Government Resilience Team, for up to date guidance and advice.

Key corporate risks are subject to periodic review and scrutiny by management and Elected Members to ensure that the risks are properly understood and being adequately controlled. Two corporate risks recently reviewed by management, and scrutinised by Members at the Audit and Scrutiny Panel on 3rd September, are health and safety and financial sustainability.

Business continuity

In line with the business continuity guidance supporting the Corporate Resilience Plan, an annual return requires to be completed by each Head of Service to demonstrate that business continuity arrangements have been reviewed, tested, and recorded over the year.

With the ongoing response to the pandemic, the testing of business continuity arrangements has been a live exercise. Accordingly, this has meant there are numerous examples that can provide evidence as to what area has been tested. All annual returns have been received from Heads of Service and these examples are currently being collated and reviewed.

Local management of COVID outbreaks

In the event of future COVID outbreaks which affect the North Lanarkshire area, management arrangements were developed and implemented in August to ensure the response is managed in an effective manner and in line with national guidance. This aims to balance action which encourages progress towards recovery, renewal, and the remobilisation of systems, while simultaneously retaining the capacity to respond rapidly and flexibly in the ongoing management of COVID-19 infections and outbreaks.

Throughout the last six months, the council has worked effectively with partners, specifically NHS Lanarkshire. This continues, in particular with the Test and Protect response which is key to the quick containment of any small outbreak. In addition, NHS Lanarkshire are working on six work streams which are being developed to ensure any future outbreaks are addressed in

as efficient manner as possible. Each of these areas involve varying degrees of input from the council.

Effective cross-agency working is essential to managing the communications impacts of a coronavirus impact. The council's Head of Strategic Communication has been in regular contact with the Director of Communications at NHS Lanarkshire and a protocol for managing the communications aspects of any outbreak has been agreed. Most recently, this protocol has been in place for the Incident Management Team for the Sitel outbreak.

Feedback provided to the council following this outbreak advised that the Chief Medical Officer was *"impressed with the joint response on Sitel - it was described as textbook"*.

9. The council has established clear roles and communication channels during COVID-19.

Resilience roles and responsibilities

The council's Corporate Resilience Plan (published in September 2018) states that the *"key to effective resilience development and emergency management depends on the engagement and support of the people who will implement the resilience arrangements. That being the case, they must be aware of and understand their role in each stage of the process and take ownership of the associated responsibilities."*

The plan outlines clear roles and responsibilities as summarised below within the current context. The plan also states that the Civil Contingencies Act advocates that resilience development activities should be viewed as an extension of normal working practices, skills, and experiences. This would, in a time of emergency, see people perform their normal jobs albeit in extraordinary circumstances.

- The resilience development unit, which is led by the Head of Regulatory Services and Waste solutions.
- The corporate resilience management team (CRMT), which is in essence Gold Command and as a corporate group (as clearly stated in the Corporate Resilience Plan) it is *"empowered with the executive authority to undertake emergency preparedness and response activities to manage and co-ordinate the council's and HSCP response to any emergency situation, which threatens or affects the community or causes serious disruption to the delivery of council services"*.
- The strategic representative for resilience development. Responsibilities of this role, carried out by the Head of Regulatory Services and Waste Solutions, includes providing executive support and direction to the CRMT, briefing the Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team, attending West of Scotland Regional Resilience Partnership (WoSRRP) meetings, and ensuring the maintenance of an action log.
- The Corporate Management Team. Resilience planning requires the participation of strategic management to ensure the process is correctly introduced, adequately supported, and established as part of the council's culture.
- Council Leaders and other Elected Members. As noted in the Corporate Resilience Plan, the scope and frequency of Elected Member involvement in an emergency will depend greatly on the scale, impact, and type of event. The role of the council's Elected Members can be encapsulated thus - to provide advice and information to the community concerning the scope of the council's activities in emergencies, to advise the CRMT of any specific concerns or issues affecting the community, to assist with VIP visits at the request of the Chief Executive.
- Employees. Responsibilities of employees in emergency preparedness, response, recovery, and review includes assisting in the development of service resilience arrangements and projects, and participating in responding to events, the de-briefing process, and a review of resilience plans, as required.

Communications

From an internal and stakeholder perspective, the main aim of formal communication plans is to ensure timely, effective communication which clearly explains impacts for services and staff, as such:

- Executive Directors continued to hold meetings with Heads of Service and the meetings structure continued. This included cascading down to managers having regular team meetings or 1:1s with staff.
- Daily briefings were held with the managers across Health and Social Work to disseminate actions from the command structures and co-ordinate activity.
- Over the period from 13th March to 13th August, 86 briefing notes were issued to Elected Members. This communication also included MP/MSPs, members of the Corporate Management Team, and the wider audience (which includes 3rd, 4th and 5th tier managers).
- Union consultation with GMB, Unison and Unite, EIS and NASUWT took place via a weekly phone conference, as well as ongoing local consultation on COVID matters.
- Fortnightly Extended Corporate Management Team video conference meetings took place with the wider audience of 3rd, 4th, and 5th tier managers. The number of participants at these Webex meetings ranged from 62 to 94 across the 11 meetings that were held from May to September. This focused on recovery and next steps.

Engagement

The processes and structures in place also facilitated an extensive range of internal and external communications and engagement. This included full interaction with Elected Members throughout - with weekly meetings between the Chief Executive and all party leaders covering updates on response activity and recovery proposals, 86 e-mail briefings, and fortnightly meetings nationally. Heads of Service / Executive Directors continued regular engagement with Committee Conveners providing service specific updates. The Chief Executive participated in a weekly meeting with all other councils' chief executives, weekly meetings were held with all Trade Unions, and the Lanarkshire Local Resilience Partnership met weekly.

10. The council has made use of digital innovation to support shared and effective decision making during COVID-19.

A report to the Transformation and Digitisation Committee on 2nd September detailed a wide range of activities implemented by the business solutions team to further develop and enable the digital infrastructure, hardware, software, and solutions required to ensure delivery of not just the most critical services required to respond to the pandemic, but also many business as usual activities. This includes:

- **Enhancements to the infrastructure to enable full scale working from home**
 - This required the mobilisation of all available technologies to allow the delivery of services and support to employees. It involved increasing what was initially limited capacity by re-provisioning and re-prioritising hardware and bandwidth capability.
 - This enabled full open access to all those working from home through Any Connect from 30th March. The improvements deployed accommodated the average of 1,900 daily users working on AnyConnect, with approximately 3,900 remote access tokens in place.
 - Prior to 23rd March, normal home working utilisation was less than 100 users per day, with the system scoped to accommodate a maximum of around 500 users per day. The maximum pre-COVID-19 had never been experienced.
- **Responding to the significant demand created by moving from physical to virtual meetings**
 - Any traffic associated with online meetings had to traverse through the same council internet hardware as Any Connect and therefore had a detrimental effect on the ability to continue to deliver services. Therefore, in the early weeks the use of online meetings was controlled to allow further solutions to be developed to minimise or remove their impact on the network.
 - The introduction of Webex allowed the off boarding of associated traffic and minimised

the impact to the core broadband capacity. 100 Webex licenses are now in use and this platform is very well used for online meetings.

- **Supporting services for the most vulnerable**

In addition to the creation of the Helping Hands system (noted in *statements 2, 3, 4, and 5*), other areas of digital innovation include:

- Creation of a post and print file to allow over 18,000 families, eligible for free school meals, to receive vouchers to support financial hardship.
- Development of a shielding and vulnerable people App, ready to be put into production should a second wave of COVID-19 hit.

- **Developing a digital classroom and community hubs**

- As the schools closed in March, the council worked with the Scottish Government and Education Scotland to ensure learning continued. Support was provided to roll out technology requirements using Glow, Scotland's national learning platform.
- This helped to ensure that North Lanarkshire's children and young people were plugged in and online doing home learning over the lockdown period.

- **Facilitating the use of school hubs with a new online booking form for key workers**

- From the outset of the pandemic the council's community hubs provided support for the children of key workers, vulnerable children, and those with additional support needs.
- Following the Scottish Government guidelines, an online booking system was created and implemented for hub places, assisting over 31,000 children to attend the hubs and family learning centres.

- **Providing support for businesses**

- Following the national announcement in early May on a range of support funds for businesses, the business solutions team worked on behalf of enterprise and communities to develop online forms for the Self Employed Hardship Fund, the B & B Hardship Fund, and the grant support for small and medium sized businesses, thus allowing applications to be fast-tracked and monies paid, where appropriate, in a timely manner.

Health and Social Care

There was a rapid deployment of Microsoft Teams across the health and social care management team to support daily conference calls as well as weekly conference calls with all independent supplier groups. Netcall was deployed across home support, allowing administrative staff to work effectively from home.

The use of video consultations has been growing in health and social care in recent years, but this was rapidly extended at the start of the pandemic to support ongoing engagement with service users.

Hybrid meetings

Using the functionality within Webex, a process has been developed to enable virtual meetings to be held for all Council and Committee meetings from 13th August. This has enabled Elected Members to continue to fulfil their democratic role and governance responsibilities, while still ensuring compliance with the national guidance on physical distancing.

Further work is underway to develop a process for hybrid meetings; this would mean some Elected Members and officers may attend meetings in person, while others continue to participate in the meeting through a digital platform. A protocol is also under development for remote Council and Committee meetings. Installation works are scheduled to be completed in October and, following testing, it is hoped these new arrangements may be ready for trial at a committee meeting towards the end of cycle 4 (pending any government guidance in place at the time regarding being indoors).

11. Council structures have delivered activities efficiently and effectively during COVID-19.

Planning assumptions

As noted in *statement 3*, one of the base planning assumptions applied throughout the pandemic stated that “*staffing resources across the council are viewed as a common resource and any employees not able to be actively employed are automatically placed within a pool resource available for use by any service area.*” This was particularly effective, especially in providing support to the most vulnerable people in communities.

Council operating model

As noted in the accompany report at Committee, *COVID-19 Recovery and Renewal Plan*, what has become clear throughout this period is that the traditional office based structures that exist within the council need to be reviewed to align staffing structures to the council’s future operating model.

Work has commenced to design a structure fit for the future and the implications on current staffing structures will be evaluated in a future report.

12. The council has ensured effective governance arrangements during COVID-19.

Temporary delegated authority in line with the Scheme of Delegation to Officers

A report presented to the Special Meeting of the Council on 19th March 2020, gained approval for the endorsement of delegated authority (already granted to the Chief Executive under the Scheme of Delegation to Officers). This was for temporary delegated authority for the Chief Executive and, in his absence, Executive Directors and the Chief Officer, Health and Social Care to make decisions which would otherwise require Council or Committee approval in the event that there is a requirement for the decision making process of the Council, namely Committees and the Council, to be suspended due to the effects of COVID-19.

Endorsement of this delegated authority was sought in advance of any situation arising where Committee meetings may have to be cancelled. This was done because if the request was made at the time it was required, then it was unlikely that a meeting could be convened to provide such authority. It was therefore considered prudent to obtain such authority in advance of being required.

Risk was a key consideration in this; should Committees and/or the Council be unable to meet there is a risk that the business of the organisation will not be able to be undertaken due to the lack of a decision making process. Accordingly, it was considered prudent to seek endorsement of the temporary delegated authority (already granted to the Chief Executive under the Scheme of Delegation to Officers) should the situation arise where important decisions cannot be made by the normal process of a Committee of the Council.

This was required to ensure the council was able to continue to operate effectively, and undertake decision making, if required, during the COVID-19 emergency. The risk to the council of not being able to operate due to the absence of effective decision making is considered significant, not only because of the potential financial impact on the organisation, but also given the considerable impact on service delivery and the ability to meet new and/or additional legislative requirements and expectations.

At the Special Meeting of the Council on 19th March 2020, it was agreed:

- that the Council was in an emergency situation due to COVID-19,
- that the Council endorsed the delegations already granted to the Chief Executive to take decisions, as required, in the event that meetings of the Council or its Committees require to be cancelled as a result of COVID-19, and
- that, in the absence of the Chief Executive, such delegation be given to Executive Directors and/or the Chief Officer, Health and Social Care, as appropriate

On 23rd March 2020 the country moved into lockdown and the Chief Executive confirmed to all Elected Members that all Council and Committee meetings were to be suspended with

immediate effect and that all necessary decisions, which would normally be taken by a Committee, would now be dealt with under his delegated authority.

Process for decision making under delegated authority

In order to ensure Elected Members were able to effectively fulfil their role and governance responsibilities, and there was transparency in decision making, a process was established through which Committee business was progressed during the emergency period. This included:

- Publication of Committee reports on the council's website six clear days before the date on which the Committee would normally have met.
- An invitation to Elected Members to provide comments on each report to the respective chief officer, with a deadline for submission of these being 12 noon on the day before the date the Committee would normally have met.
- A video conference meeting - on the date the Committee would normally have met - between the Chief Executive and all officers who had submitted a report for consideration. The Chief Executive was provided with all comments made by Elected Members to each report, together with any further narrative by officers in respect of the comments.
- Determination of each report in turn by the Chief Executive.
- Recording of these decisions by an officer from the committee services team.
- Publication of these decisions thereafter on the council's website.

Details of decisions made

A subsequent report to the Council meeting on 13th August provided Elected Members with details of decisions made by the Chief Executive in the period from 22nd March to 30th June 2020 under the delegated authority already provided to him in the approved Scheme of Delegation to Officers and confirmed by the Council at its Special Meeting held on 19th March 2020.

At this meeting Members noted the process followed by the Chief Executive, and other officers, for the determining of decisions under delegated authority during the period 22nd March to 30th June 2020. A summary list of decisions taken under delegated authority by the Chief Executive was also provided.

Financial management and sustainability

As noted in *statement 8* and reported to the Finance and Resources Committee on 24th September, an early decision by Gold Command was the implementation of a monitoring process to record the financial impact of the council's response to COVID-19.

The risk to the financial sustainability of the council as a result of the material financial impact of COVID-19 has been, and continues to be, a priority consideration for Gold Command and the Corporate Management Team. This is also reflected in the updated risk assessment for financial sustainability reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Panel on 3rd September.

The COVID-19 lockdown and move to home working coincided with vital work to complete annual budgets for 2020/21 and ensure the council submitted draft 2019/2020 annual accounts to Audit Scotland. Despite the challenges and additional demands on the financial solutions team, the annual budgeting exercise was largely completely in line with agreed timescales.

This facilitated the vital requirement to forecast the financial impact of both the response and recovery of the pandemic on the 2020/21 financial year, and to ensure early decision making to manage and mitigate the material financial consequences. In addition, the team completed the draft annual accounts exercise within the statutory deadline of 30th June.

The team also led a mid-year review of the 2020/21 revenue budget challenge facing the council, discussed at the Council meeting on 13th August.

An update of the 5-year Medium Term Financial Plan has also been carried out. This aims to reflect additional considerations required in relation to the recurring impact of COVID-19 on future financial plans. This is the subject of a separate report to Policy and Strategy Committee on 1st October.

In addition, the team led a mid-year review of the council's capital programme to reflect the challenges faced by the construction sector during COVID-19 and to ensure the plans remain affordable, prudent, and sustainable.

Arm's lengths external organisations (ALEOs)

As reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Panel on 23rd September, various arrangements were put in place by the respective ALEO and external body to ensure that proper governance was maintained, and the risk environment was assessed and addressed appropriately, during lockdown and recovery.

Strategic governance

From a strategic good governance perspective, the extent of changes impacting on a range of council practices and working arrangements necessitated amendments to several strategies, policies, plans, frameworks, codes, registers, and procedures which the council employs to demonstrate compliance with good governance practices. Work undertaken included:

- Completion of Data Protection Impact Assessments for Helping Hands.
- Formalisation of a Data Sharing Agreement between the council and VANL due to the sensitive nature of data available through channels.
- A review and update of the Digital and IT Strategy, including eight of its sub policies.
- An update of the Acceptable Use of ICT Policy to reflect emerging conditions.

In addition, the considerable changes to working practices for employees has resulted in a number of HR policies which need to be reviewed and revised to support the workforce transition process, and in particular the move to home working and associated change in working environment this will bring. These HR policies have been identified and are on a prioritised list for review and redevelopment (e.g. this includes the Employee Code of Conduct, Smarter Working Policy and Guidance, Workforce Change Policy, Managing Attendance, and Equality and Diversity in Employment).

Internal Audit will review the council's new (2020/21) corporate governance arrangements as part of the 2020/21 Plan and will report to the Audit and Scrutiny Panel on this in due course.

C. Support for staff during COVID-19

13. The council has provided good mental health and wellbeing support for staff during COVID-19.

The Corporate Resilience Plan states that the role and responsibilities of employees from an incident alert to stand-down cannot be overstated. While the diligent management of an emergency is crucial to its outcome, it is the skills, dedication, and competencies of staff that ensure a successful conclusion.

Statutory employment legislation, including the Employment Rights Act 1996 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 afford all employees statutory rights; this legislation remains unchanged by the COVID-19 context and has continued to be adhered to as the council responds to the changing and evolving working environment.

The workforce model of the council has been a regular agenda item at both Gold and Silver Command meetings during the last six months. Discussions recognised the unprecedented set of restrictions which the COVID-19 pandemic placed on working environments, with

significant numbers of employees now working from home, and changes required for those who must continue to operate from a formal work location or base.

As the council continues to respond and evolve to meet the requirements of the new context, it was recognised that there would be many difficult workforce challenges for managers, employees, and Trade Union colleagues to jointly manage and resolve. Feedback from the Corporate Management Team session on 1st September, highlighted the positive engagement with, and response from, all Trade Unions throughout the last six months.

Supporting the physical and mental wellbeing of the workforce remains a critical consideration as the council responds to the outbreak. Protecting them and enabling them to stay healthy is vital for their own wellbeing, and to be able to continue to deliver vital services to the people and communities of North Lanarkshire. The types of supports put in place to ensure appropriate levels of support include:

- Distributing over 4,784,077 separate items of PPE to protect staff while they are at work (and the people they are assisting).
- Further developing aspects of NL life - which is available to all staff and provides benefits and discounts, health and well-being support, and learning and development opportunities.
- Examples on Work Well NL (<https://www.nllife.co.uk/workwell-nl-coronavirushomepage/>) include Coronavirus testing for key workers and family / household members, how to access the Time for Talking helpline, links to SAMH and Breathing Space, and a *going home* checklist to help switch off from work life at the end of the day to help and switch over to home life. Information is also provided on financial advice and supports and getting the most out of working from home, including webinars, playlists, best practice approaches, tips for working remotely, managing teams remotely and having successful online meetings, and advice and guidance for sitting properly.
- Developing a dedicated health and wellbeing page on the website. This reminded those working from home of the importance of staying active and provided some ideas about dancing to music, playing active video games and improving muscle and strength balancing. Links were also provided to external resources including a variety of online exercise classes, nutrition advice, and Facebook live sessions so people can stay healthy and active indoors.
- Launching a Mental Health Awareness week (May) to support staff and encourage everyone to get involved. This comprised lots of online opportunities - including new resources, webinars, e-learning, coffee-break bite-sized videos, and quizzes.
- As reported in *We Aspire* (April), the outstanding effort and enthusiasm put in by staff to deliver essential and new services was recognised. Key workers at the frontline, across a range of services who have been working hard to help communities, were provided with packed lunches as a small way to say thank you.

Staff survey

To ensure that the council's employee counselling service, *Time for Talking*, provides the most appropriate mental health and wellbeing support during the challenging time, an online survey was circulated to all staff in April. The survey allowed *Time for Talking* to gather anonymous feedback on how staff felt they were coping and what aspects of either working from home or travelling to work were causing the most concern. *Time for Talking* shared the results with the council to determine other wellbeing support that can be offered at this time.

The results were shared at an Extended Corporate Management Team session and through the *We Aspire* newsletter in June. Key headlines are summarised below.

- Almost a third of the council's workforce responded and provided some insight into the benefits and challenges people are facing.
- Staff were, in the main, happy for virtual working arrangements to continue with the right technology, training, and support.
- Most staff are able to work from home or remotely, if their role enables them to do so.

- Having good access to IT equipment, tools to communicate with each other, and feeling informed about council decision making around services were considered important.
- Challenges were highlighted around the limited social scope of remote working and additional pressures from personal circumstances and feelings of anxiety.
- Health and wellbeing were felt to be important and having access to really good, useful advice on a range of platforms was considered vital, as well as the right support and training to work from home effectively and manage and motivate remote teams.

A range of webinar sessions were hosted to help with health and wellbeing issues and over 4,000 staff to date have directly accessed new and improved mental wellness resources, such as mindfulness, self-care, and a new series of building resilience webinars.

Over 48,000 hits to date on the *myNL* employee portal have helped managers and staff access current HR and health and safety information, policies, and guidance.

Home working self-assessments

As reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Panel on 3rd September, the health and safety team have played a crucial role as part of the COVID-19 pandemic. This work has included supporting employees with occupational health requirements, such as Display Screen Equipment (DSE) self-assessment processes in a home working environment.

In this respect the team created a DSE homeworking self-assessment via iTrent. This was required to be completed by all staff and the team are reviewing over 2,000 self-assessment responses and home working risk assessment questionnaires to inform plans moving forward.

14. Taking into account the levels of absence experienced during this challenging time, staffing levels have been appropriate to meet the needs of service users during COVID-19.

The level of absence experienced over the last six months was a regular agenda item at Gold and Silver Command meetings. This included a regular review of information on the number of staff presenting as absent associated with COVID-19, compared to a baseline of normal absence levels for the current period.

Regular reports were also presented to the Corporate Management Team to ensure appropriate management review and response.

This ongoing management scrutiny enabled the level of sickness absence in North Lanarkshire to remain consistently lower than the national average from May to August, as reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Panel on 23rd September.

15. The council has ensured that practical advice and guidance has been readily available for staff as and when they needed it.

From the outset, personal messages were issued to all staff from the Chief Executive, with all employees affected by the pandemic regardless of role. Early communications noted the scale of the volunteer effort already underway, with many employees delaying their retirement or offering to work across priority areas to support the council's overall response.

An early message on 20th March communicated the importance of continuing to provide critical care, wider supports, and services to the people and communities of North Lanarkshire at what was a time of great uncertainty. This included advising of the imminent publication of key worker categories, which had implications for all employees. The message also set out the council's immediate resilience planning response and emphasised the need for a one council response in terms of shared resources.

Such messaging has continued throughout the months to date, with many elements reinforced through the monthly *We Aspire* newsletters.

Internal communications

Clear and timely communication to staff is considered essential to the success of the recovery strategy. The key aim is to ensure that service changes which affect staff are communicated to them directly by the council and, preferably, by their line managers. To this end, communications were extensive in terms of the range, volume, and frequency of information, guidance, and advice that was shared internally with staff and Elected Members, and externally with the public. Examples include:

- Regular NLC e-mail announcements to all staff covering various topics, such as coronavirus advice and guidance, preventative cleaning of workspaces, physical distancing, home working, remote access, IT help desk contact information, mobile phone cleaning, risk assessment requirements, and annual leave.
- A dedicated page on *myNL*, providing coronavirus information for staff. This reiterates the guidance issued by NHS Scotland as being the only information which staff should rely; it also provides links to the dedicated NHS Lanarkshire web page and helpline. The *myNL* platform is accessible to all staff on any device, including mobile phones.
- Further resources on *myNL* providing practical guidance on returning to the workplace, supporting essential services, sickness and isolation, safety and wellbeing, annual leave and public holiday arrangements, caring for children of key workers, virtual recruitment interviews, booking a coronavirus text, and a set of FAQs.
- Messages from the Chief Executive registering thanks, directing staff to dedicated pages on *myNL* for information and support (e.g. on health and wellbeing and volunteering).
- Continued publication of the monthly *We Aspire* newsletter with news from around the council and practical advice and guidance. This includes for example, in July, guidance for staff accessing offices, school buildings and facilities, and other places of work in light of the programme of work underway by the asset and property team to implement health and safety measures (such as signage to maintain physical distancing and enhanced sanitisation procedures).
- Regular briefing notes prepared by the Head of Strategic Communications / Media and Communications Manager and issued to Elected Members, MP/MSPs, members of the Corporate Management Team, and 3rd/ 4th/5th tier managers. These provided updates on a wide range of topics - such as the community hubs, business support, return to school, PPE guidance, and updates on national legislation.

Health and safety

As reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Panel on 3rd September, the health and safety team offered advice and guidance on appropriate and tailored risk assessments and worked in services in partnership with managers and Trade Unions to address COVID related issues and concerns.

As noted in *statement 8*, the corporate risk for health and safety was reviewed and updated in light of the COVID-19 context. This lists several key controls implemented to address additional COVID-19 risks; an example of the controls which ensured that practical advice and guidance was readily available for staff are listed below:

- Timely consideration, distribution, and implementation of NHS and Government information and advice, such as:
 - Guidance to staff on how to protect themselves and others, i.e. posters on hygiene procedures.
 - Implementation and guidance on physical distancing, i.e. working from home where feasible, avoiding unnecessary meetings, and unnecessary travel.
 - Ensuring staff required to shield were sent home for a period of 12 weeks, in line with Government advice.

- Timely closure of facilities such as leisure centres, gyms, and theatres in line with advice on large gatherings.
- Establishment of dedicated Employee Service Centre and COVID-19 e-mail addresses to report and capture event related absences.
- Issuing of regular guidance to managers to cascade to staff on the importance of maintaining physical distancing and safe working arrangements for those unable to work from home, plus guidance on working from home.
- Increasing the use of Yammer, and other digital communication tools, to maintain connectedness and reduce isolation.

Practical advice and guidance have also been available through a range of resources created by the health and safety team. This includes individual and workplace risk assessment templates and manager guidance, briefings to all head teachers and head of early years establishments to support the safe opening of the education estate, and on-site visits to ensure compliance with relevant Health Protection Scotland guidance.

16. The council has developed approaches to engage with staff around service innovation to support Recovery and Renewal Planning in response to COVID-19.

Extended Corporate Management Team engagement

Fortnightly Extended Corporate Management Team video conference meetings took place with the wider audience of 3rd, 4th, and 5th tier managers. The number of participants at these Webex meetings ranged from 62 to 94 across the 11 meetings that were held from May to September.

The focus of these sessions was *recovery and next steps* and a wide range of information was shared and discussed in terms of the council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the recovery planning process, the associated planning assumptions and business objectives, financial position, staff survey results, and staff wellbeing measures. With each of the council's diverse range of services represented at these meetings, this enabled timely informed discussions that were then able to be cascaded to teams and staff.

Weekly engagement sessions were also undertaken with all Trade Unions. This engagement has been critical in ensuring the maintenance of a stable employee relations environment during both the pandemic and recovery stages, when many changes to ways of working and working environments were required.

Response and recovery

Heads of Service have presented a series of reports to service Committees during cycle 3, this highlights the extent of staff involvement in work undertaken over the last six months to continue to support members of the public, local businesses, and other council services. These reports are available to view from the links below:

- Transformation and Digitisation Committee on 2nd September
<https://mars.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/egenda/images/att94508.pdf>
- Adult Health and Social Care Committee on 8th September
<https://mars.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/egenda/images/att94419.pdf>
- Housing and Regeneration Committee on 9th September
<https://mars.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/egenda/images/att94331.pdf>
- Education and Families Committee on 15th September
<https://mars.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/egenda/images/att94635.pdf>
- Finance and Resources Committee on 24th September
<https://mars.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/egenda/images/att94572.pdf>

D. New ways of working

17. The council has established key principles that should underpin recovery strategies.

The Recovery Plan, published on the council's website in July, reported that the council established a recovery group in May. This comprised senior officers from across the council to plan the recovery and renewal of services.

The impact of COVID-19 may have forced changes to the ways in which services are delivered, but it has provided an opportunity to review all service areas. To ensure a consistent approach, a set of base Planning Assumptions were developed to be used when recovering and/or re-designing services. These Planning Assumptions aligned to the council's Corporate Resilience Plan.

In addition, a set of Business Objectives were developed; these are aligned to The Plan for North Lanarkshire and the council's Financial Strategy and require to be met by the recovery plans.

The development of the recovery plans involved an exercise to assign a risk rating to business areas in services in terms of (a) the risk of non-recovery and (b) the risk of COVID-19. The former required an assessment of the potential impact on the council, and the achievement of its ambitions, if this activity was not recovered. The matrix for risk of non-recovery was aligned to the five council priorities in The Plan for North Lanarkshire.

Using the ratings for the risk of non-recovery and COVID-19, a prioritisation matrix was subsequently developed to prioritise the recovery of all business areas into three levels; this prioritisation also considered the phasing within the Scottish Government's *Route Map*.

The high level *Recovery Plan for North Lanarkshire* was published on the council's website in July; this highlighted some of the ways in which the council continued to deliver services throughout the pandemic and set out a plan for how services will be recovered along with the principles at the heart of the recovery process.

It makes clear that the council retains its ambitious plans for the future, both in terms of transforming towns and communities and reshaping services that support residents, businesses, and economic recovery.

Following the Council meeting on 13th August, a *Member / Officer COVID-19 working group on recovery* has been established to aid the development of recovery from COVID, and act as an advisory group in the event of a subsequent wave of the virus.

18. The council is reviewing the strategic implications that Renewal and Recovery Plans may have for agreed LOIP outcomes.

One Place One Plan

Endorsement of The Plan for North Lanarkshire and shared ambition by the North Lanarkshire Partnership (November 2018) and, as reported to the Policy and Strategy Committee in February 2019, the move to a single plan (The Plan for North Lanarkshire) meant the integration of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP).

This integration was not intended to dilute the work of the NLP, moreover it strengthened it by ensuring a clear delineation between strategic and operational (local) community planning matters. This provided a clear direction for strategic partnership working, for which the governance was streamlined following the subsequent development of the partnership Programme of Work (June 2019) and the establishment of the North Lanarkshire Partnership Strategic Leadership Board (September 2019).

NLP Strategic Leadership Board

A report to the NLP Strategic Leadership Board on 2nd September recognised the successes across North Lanarkshire (signified by The Plan for North Lanarkshire) in terms of economic growth, inward investment, population growth, and rising employment. It also noted there remains unacceptably high levels of deprivation and child poverty, in work poverty, and clear areas of inequity and inequality across communities and the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic will have added to these challenges.

This report focused on stabilising partnership activities in the new environment and proactively forward planning and strategising for what's next. Key points taken forward by the NLP Strategic Leadership Board following approval of this report are:

- Acknowledgement that early evidence indicates the outbreak will have affected many segments of North Lanarkshire's population and remains particularly detrimental to those social groups in the most vulnerable situations. This includes people living in poverty situations, older persons, persons with disabilities, and young people's mental health.
- Recognition that the COVID-19 response involved many new ways of working for partner organisations in order to deal with the impact of the virus, protect communities through planned response activity, and continue to deliver critical care, supports, and services.
- A clear understanding that organisations have not done this alone; community spirit and mutual aid have been reignited and public organisations have worked with local organisations, charities, volunteers, and communities to help deliver a holistic response. The community response to the pandemic has been central to ensuring people's wellbeing, enabling public organisations to cope, and reaching people otherwise missed.
- Agreement that the focus needs to be on moving from responding to the pandemic and mobilising resources on a day to day basis, to stabilising activities in the new environment and proactively forward planning and strategising for what's next.

To proactively address the challenges in the new environment, the Board will maintain the overarching strategic framework for stabilising partnership activities and strategising for what's next. This will involve addressing complex issues which need a shared response, helping to co-ordinate initiatives and partnerships, rationalising and simplifying cluttered landscapes, and improving the connections between national priorities and those at regional, local, and neighbourhood levels.

19. The council is looking to permanently retain successful innovations developed during the response to COVID-19.

Sustainability was a key consideration of Gold Command's decision making, not just in terms of an incident response in line with the Corporate Resilience Plan, but also in terms of futureproofing services, resources, and solutions. In this respect a range of innovations were developed during the response to COVID-19 and are being retained, some were reported to the Transformation and Digitisation Committee on 2nd September; this includes:

- Redevelopment of the council's home working solution, Any Connect, to ensure long-term sustainability and support new models of service delivery.
- Deployment of a further 300 laptops across services, building on the 1,500 deployed during the refresh programme of the last financial year and securing further capital funding for the refresh of an additional 2,000 devices this year, the majority expected to be laptops.
- The planned roll out of Microsoft Office 365, which was accelerated due to the need to change how staff worked during the pandemic and is now being progressed at pace to sustain these arrangements into the future.
 - A comprehensive communication and engagement is in place to ensure all staff are aware of the changes and learn about the support that is available through LearnNL. Over 700, 3-5-minute videos are available to support users in the use of the new M365 applications, including Teams, SharePoint, and Yammer.
 - The fast-track roll-out of Microsoft Teams to 200 users is underway with a closed pilot to iron-out teething issues, followed by an open pilot. Numbers will continue to grow as the

wider DigitalNL workplace continues its mass migration between now and March 2021. At that point approximately 5,000 users will have migrated to Microsoft Office 365.

- Building on the success of the free school meals “bot” to support processing payments ahead of the start of the new school year, a number of requests for the development of intelligent automation (robotic process automation “bots”) have been received to alleviate processing burdens. These are being prioritised in line with the recovery plan.
- Development of a pilot of an immersive classroom experience, following engagement with BT Open Reach. A room within Muirfield Community Centre, Cumbernauld has been identified and will be fitted out with a multi-projector and speaker system that will use 5G connectivity to deliver content in a completely new manner for the council. This project is being fully funded by BT for one year with the asset remaining in the ownership of the council thereafter. This is viewed as an exciting opportunity to pilot new methods of digital experience and learning, it may also present opportunities for alternatives to site visits, which would aid the continued response to COVID-19.

20. The council is making preparations to ensure that lessons learned are being addressed in case of any future pandemic.

A facilitated session was held at a virtual Corporate Management Team meeting on 1st September. This reflected on decision making and actions by the council during the response stage to COVID-19, considering what worked well, what did not work so well, and what lessons had been learned.

Members of the Corporate Management Team were asked to identify one thing they might do differently if there's a next time; this feedback is listed below:

1. While a Communication Strategy was developed and approved by Gold Command in March, and there is evidence of a wide range, volume, and frequency of internal and external communications being pushed out, having more of a formal structure to internal communications from the beginning would have been beneficial. The extent to which all relevant information, guidance, and key contact details reached all staff, regardless of their working location, is not completely clear, particularly in the early weeks.
2. Linked to this is the need to improve two-way communications. While the cascading of information and instructions from Gold to Silver and Bronze Commands operated well, it was considered that there was a need to improve communication and feedback from the bottom up. The staff survey, undertaken in April, was considered a good start in this respect.
3. While partnership working and relationships are well established across North Lanarkshire's public and voluntary sectors, both in terms of the community planning partnership and local resilience response partnerships, it was considered that the council could have picked up on some specific partnership, and pan-Lanarkshire, opportunities at an earlier stage to enhance the response.
4. In addition, it was considered that partnership working could have been improved further with more detailed / targeted briefings prepared for key community anchor organisations on decisions being made by the council (not just COVID response related).
5. From a national perspective, a common approach to some of the decisions made (e.g. supplier payments), may have avoided some of the issues that followed. Similarly, more formal arrangements around who pays for what and when - the concept of *mutual aid*, for example, was not clearly defined.
6. While decisions made at Gold and Silver Command meetings were recorded in line with the requirements of the Corporate Resilience Plan, more consistent recording of formal internal and external engagement with Elected Members and other stakeholders (along with the items discussed and decisions made) is considered an improvement action to be addressed. Examples of these include a formal minute of weekly engagement sessions with the political groups as a collective from the outset, and formal issue at officer meetings to ensure full clarity and understanding.
7. Linking to information already contained within the Corporate Resilience Plan and the

- Scheme of Delegation to Officers, a future consideration is the identification of how delegated decisions will operate in practice.
8. Setting out more formally the relationship between Gold Command, the Corporate Management Team, and the Recovery Group (in terms of the functions of the groups) is considered an improvement action required to help avoid any potential overlap in the future.
 9. While communications to the public using a range of platforms was extensive, it was considered there was still a gap in terms of more consistent and direct communication to specific service users and the public. This related to the prioritisation of services and the contact channels available to service users (particularly in social work services).
 10. The rapidly evolving picture, for example from a HR, health and safety, and Health Protection Scotland perspective, needed an immediate local response in terms of establishing joint working groups, identifying solutions, and ensuring a timely flow of information - sometimes this response was more reactive in nature. Moving forward the lessons learned will facilitate a more proactive approach.
 11. While a workforce profiling exercise was undertaken to identify any areas of capacity to address gaps in critical services which required additional support, it was considered that the risks to staff, and the expectations of staff, were inconsistent across the council.
 12. Linked to improvements in internal communications, awareness raising of staff in terms of their role related to resilience response and emergency planning, and their role in following the chain of command in such circumstances, would have improved their understanding for the decisions that had been made and what they were being asked to do.

The 20 statements are extracted from *COVID-19 - Capturing Learning at Corporate Level*, one of a series of public sector self-evaluation style toolkits developed by the Improvement Service to capture learning from the COVID-19 pandemic and support councils through recovery and renewal planning processes.

Source: https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0028/18793/C-19-Checklist-Capturing-Learning-at-Corporate-Level.pdf