

COVID-19: Warrington's response so far



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Our approach

To follow our approach to dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic locally, we refer to February 2020 as our baseline for 'business as usual'.

Partnership resilience arrangements

From 11 March, we participated in weekly strategic coordinating group (SCG) meetings across Cheshire. Following the Prime Minister's unprecedented announcement on 23 March, which detailed the government's response to the pandemic, our participation in SCG meetings changed to twice-weekly.

From 25 March to the end of April, SCG met daily. This reduced again to twice weekly from 8 June. Tactical command groups, which report to the SCG, also followed this pattern.

This ensured that there was continuous, up-to-date sub-regional awareness and response. This aligned to the council's own Major Emergency Plan and we have worked with our multi-agency partners across the system to deliver our statutory responsibilities (and beyond).

The structures and governance we have followed as part of the wider system are tried-and-tested, responsive and part of our normal emergency planning arrangements. We have absolute confidence that these existing systems and processes have proven their value and importance throughout this pandemic.

Our own resilience arrangements

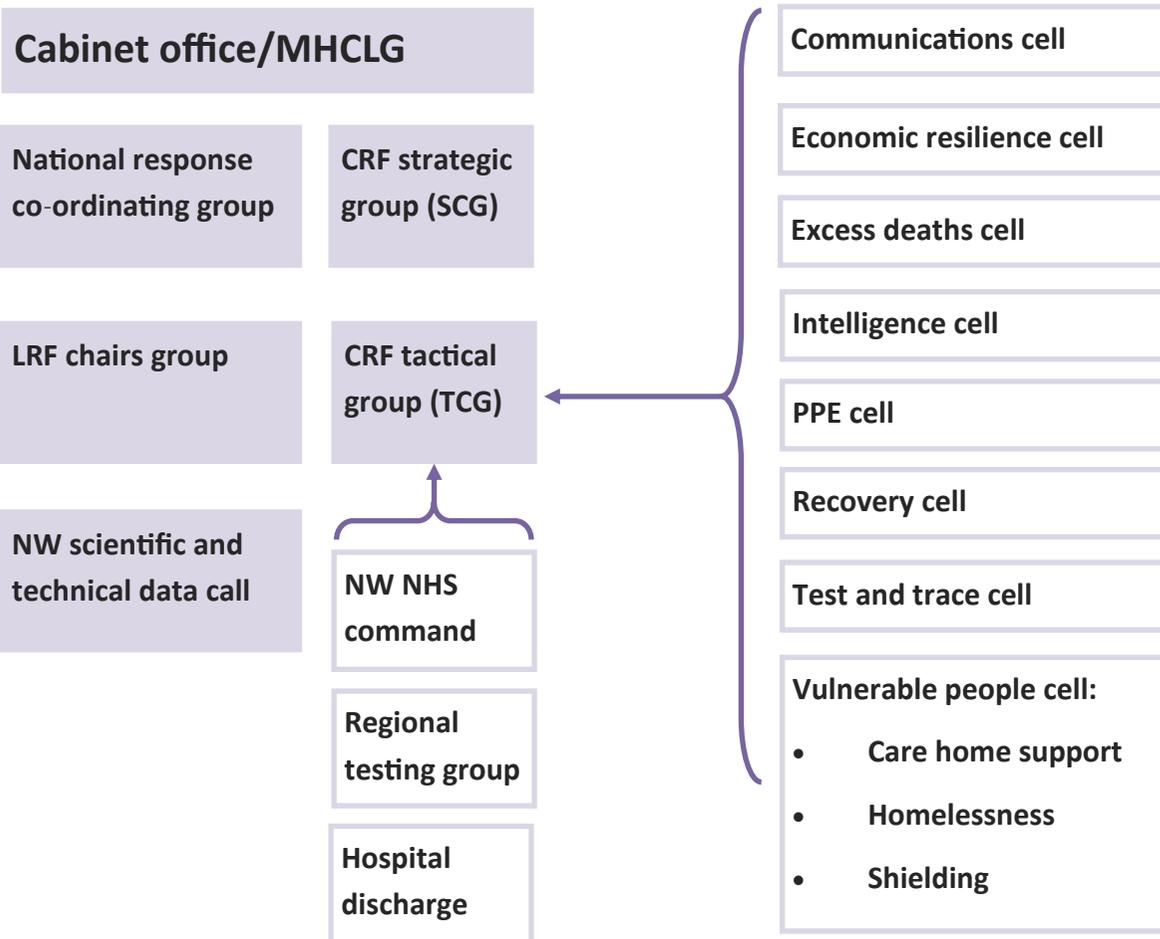
We began our internal preparations in January 2020, taking Public Health advice on the situation as it developed across the world. We mobilised and responded rapidly internally, forming an internal COVID-19 response group, which meets weekly, along with a weekly Senior Leadership Team meeting which also focuses on our response

The internal COVID-19 response group, chaired by Chief Executive Prof. Steven Broomhead, receives information about:

- Public Health overview
- Adult social care and care homes
- Children's services
- Schools and education partners
- Local resilience forum and excess deaths management
- Workforce arrangements
- IT
- Finance and resources
- Legal services
- PPE (personal protective equipment)
- Testing
- Business continuity
- Public transport
- Waste and recycling services
- Homelessness
- Volunteering
- Communications

Governance arrangements

National, regional and sub-regional structures



Council structures

WBC COVID-19 response group

CCG/hospital	Education	Finance/resources
Public health	Excess deaths	Children's services
Workforce	ICT	Democracy
Communications	Legal services	Coroners
Bereavement	Waste	Transport
Homelessness	Volunteering	PPE
Local business	Testing	Social care

Hospital discharge, social care response, care delivery, safeguarding, programme and finance, workforce/recruitment



Our initial plan

Our strong governance arrangements allowed us to quickly distil our immediate requirements and priorities. This culminated in us agreeing our initial 12-point plan:

	Recruiting more care workers and supporting partners to maintain direct care services to the most vulnerable		Keeping our schools open to support our key workers and vulnerable children		Distributing food parcels for our most in need (Safe and Well)
	Keeping our information portal, warrington.gov.uk/coronavirus , up to date with the latest guidance		Supporting our amazing community volunteering effort		Supporting our key workers by making council car parks free of charge
	Redeploying staff to support our carers and heroic front-line workers		Providing a homeless emergency centre to support people sleeping rough		Maintaining parks and green spaces for appropriate use
	Financially supporting businesses by issuing relief grants		Keeping waste collections going		Supporting free school meals for every eligible child

Our approach to communicating with communities

An 'ABC' approach

Our approach to communications was **assured**, **brave** and **clear**. We needed to ensure that our partners understood the steps we have taken (and continue to take) in our COVID-19 response. This also meant occasions where we needed to be brave about our position—a pertinent example being of our uncertainty that PPE supplies would match demand and executing an ambitious plan to procure on a large-scale basis for Warrington.

We have communicated regularly through:

- Leadership statements from the Chief Executive and Council Leader, both internally and to the media/our partners
- A coronavirus-specific area of the website
- Leaflet drops
- Social media—our Twitter and Facebook pages
- News releases to the media and members
- Internal communications—intranet and internal bulletins
- Leader's question time with all councillors
- Radio interviews (BBC Radio Merseyside/Manchester, WireFM)
- Media filming—with BBC North West Tonight and ITV Granada
- Civic leadership— officers in democratic services have supported the Mayor in attending virtual events in care homes and special events such as VE Day celebrations

Key communication figures (since mid-March)



Warrington.gov.uk/coronavirus

Visits: 191,007, page views: 315,116

114 news releases and leadership statements issued to local and regional media



COVID-19 campaign

363 social posts, 8.3k clicks, 5.4 million accounts reached



Workforce

We are proud of our entire workforce for the way they have responded to this emergency and have delivered for Warrington. This pride extends from our front line workers, continuing to safely deliver services to our residents, to our valued members of the workforce who have moved to work from home (we now have 1,500 people working regularly at home for most of their work, compared to a couple of dozen in early March).

We are also proud of the way we have worked with our Trade Unions to provide unprecedented support to our staff, to help them continue their work. All of our key decisions have been made jointly and with our workforce at heart.

Some of our key achievements:

- We created a whole organisation redeployment register to match roles with staff. For a number of roles we had more volunteers than were needed. Over 50 staff have been formally redeployed
- We introduced new HR reporting to ensure we had a full strategic overview and undertook a staff survey to provide additional support
- We have protected our clinically vulnerable and extremely clinically vulnerable staff at all times
- We introduced an extraordinary attendance policy and took other joint policy decisions to support staff
- Hundreds of other staff had to reorganise their roles to concentrate their work on supporting the council's response
- We created a COVID-19 toolkit to ensure staff had support, particularly around their WFH needs and health and wellbeing

Technology

In hindsight, the work we undertook in mid-March to increase our home working capacity from an average of around 200 per day to handle at least 1,500 home workers was one of the more straightforward tasks.

Since then, we have had to quickly respond to a deluge of needs from the organisation which have been wide ranging, but all of which have been considered in a robust way and solutions offered. Some of our key achievements during this period have been:

- Upgraded a number of applications to improve their performance for staff working from home
- Ensured that full telephone and video conferencing facilities were available to all staff working from home
- Moved to a fully digitised postal service for the whole organisation
- Set up a COVID-19 secure operation to provide laptops and other IT equipment to staff to support continued home working
- Re-purposed part of our print service to support operations including the production of patterns to support PPE production
- Introduced Microsoft Teams at pace for part of the organisation to support the broadcast of Cabinet and Committee meetings
- Supported the delivery of a programme to deliver over 400 laptops to children who needed them
- Supported virtual court hearing attendance for parents and lawyers to enable critical child safeguarding cases to continue
- Briefings to schools delivered via video over YouTube in place of usual conferences



Excess deaths management

Walton Hall and Gardens was selected as a regional temporary mortuary site in helping to manage excess deaths. This was based on a broad set of assumptions, followed by comprehensive and detailed modelling.

Fortunately, during May, the temporary mortuaries were not needed and, though they continue to be on site, they aren't currently being used.

According to ONS data (ons.gov.uk), as at 29 May 2020, during 2020 there have been 1,059 deaths in Warrington. 213 of these have been COVID-19 related.

The trend in COVID-19 related deaths is decreasing. The latest week's data (week ending 29 May) shows that six residents have died due to coronavirus. Our bereavement team have provided a critical service at this difficult time, supporting families and working closely with funeral directors.

Registrars

Since lockdown, and the curtailment of marriages/civil partnerships and the pausing of birth registrations, the Registrars Service has focused on managing the increased number of death registrations.

The service is working closely with colleagues from Bereavement Services to ensure new arrangements have been introduced successfully and are handled as sensitively as possible.



Support for our residents, businesses and communities

Support for businesses

We were allocated £36.5m funding to support our businesses and have so far distributed 92% of our allocation, around £33.8m, to those who are eligible to receive funding support.

This can be broken down into:

- Small business grants (£10k) given to 1,944 businesses = £19.44m
- Retail, hospitality and leisure grants (£10k) to 298 businesses = £2.39m
- Retail, hospitality and leisure grants (£25k) to 481 businesses = £12.02m

We led calls to Ministers to introduce further support for businesses outside the eligibility parameters for these grants. This was primarily for small and micro businesses, outside of the business rate system, who are still critical for the local economy.

In response to Warrington's championing of this sector, the government introduced a further discretionary fund at the end of May.

From this new cohort, we have to date awarded £680k to 68 small local businesses.

We have also registered details of more than 400 business with Warrington&Co. for business support and are proactively working with the BID and partners to ensure the safe reopening of the town centre.

Benchmarking against our neighbours

Council	Awards (£m)	Awards made (£m)	% of awards made
Cheshire East	99.5	76.3	79
CWAC	71.1	64.8	91
Halton	20.1	15.8	78
Salford	47.4	36.3	77
St Helens	31.6	24.4	77
Warrington	36.5	32.4	89

Support for our residents, businesses and communities

Financial support for residents

We have also been awarded a Council Tax hardship fund of £1.6m in April. Of this, £464k has already been awarded to recipients of Council Tax Support. While this figure to date may appear relatively low, it is important to note that our Council Tax support scheme is one of the most generous in the region - offering full support to residents in Band A accommodation (the majority of customers) and offering maximum support of 91.5% to those in Band B and above.

Many of our most vulnerable customers were therefore already receiving full support, had no Council Tax to pay and therefore don't require a hardship payment.

The numbers of households needing to claim Council Tax Support has also increased significantly during the period of the pandemic. The number of households now receiving Council Tax Support is 13.5k - an increase of 4% in the last two months – and has led to an additional £1.5m being paid to help households pay their Council Tax.

One more long-term factor to note are forecasts that there may be a further influx of applicants later in the year, as furlough schemes end and employees may be made redundant.

Funding impacts of COVID-19

We need to acknowledge the serious funding impacts of our response to coronavirus.

The table below shows increased costs forecasts submitted to MHCLG.

Undeliverable savings	£11.1m
Increased costs	£18.5m
Lost income	£21.6m
Total	£51.5m
MHCLG funding received to date	£11.1m
Forecast shortfall	£40.4m



Support for our residents, businesses and communities

We've been working closely with our businesses, partners and the BID to ensure that our town centre is prepared and ready to slowly open up again now that lockdown restrictions are being lifted.

Economic recovery will be a slow process but we have put in place a series of measures to support people back into traditionally high-footfall shopping areas.

We are introducing a range of one-way systems throughout the town centre with clear signage urging people to keep their distance and to, wherever possible, stay left.

This signage will flow through the town centre, with a concerted effort on ensuring there is suitable signage throughout Golden Square and other main shopping areas.

This 'keep your distance' signage will also extend to green spaces and parks to encourage the continued sensible use of our public areas.

Warrington's Own Buses are also stepping up service provision, at the same time ensuring that passengers will be made as safe as possible if they need to take public transport. There are clear social distancing measures on board, with buses only carrying 25% of normal capacity and thorough cleansing of vehicles every day.

We have created a new webpage to offer the most up to date advice and guidance: warrington.gov.uk/back-in-business



Examples of new town centre signage

Support for our residents, businesses and communities

Customer contact

The Contact Centre has taken 74% of all COVID-19 related calls and helped train volunteers and redeployed staff to support, both the call taking from customers and the call making, to over 9000 shielded/vulnerable residents. The other 26% of COVID-19 related calls came to the out of hours helpline which was set up at the end of March.

Contacts received		Contact Centre	Out of hours
Phone calls	956	819	137
Emails	594	335	259
Other	10	7	3
Total	1,560	1,161	399

Call volumes are higher than normal with Contact Centre staff prioritising those with higher support needs, taking social care first response calls and also fronting daily emergency contact related to COVID-19.

Department	Avg. weekly calls	% answered	Avg. wait time (seconds)
Council Tax	723	88	204
Other	696	83	133
Business rates	368	81	548
Refuse/bulky waste	339	85	121
Benefits	276	78	385
Switchboard	259	75	62
Street lights	254	70	112
Green waste	113	91	109
Pest control	81	81	180
Births	80	94	66
Deaths	47	96	44
Summons	46	80	183
Bue badge	41	86	152
Highways	36	73	166
Rail/ bus pass	20	88	165



Support for our residents, businesses and communities

Keeping residents 'safe and well'

Through the 'safe and well' scheme, we have distributed **4,308** food packages to vulnerable households.

On top of this, through our partnership arrangement, we have referred **64 households** to Warrington Foodbank for support.

We have been fortunate to have a willing army of volunteers on hand to support our shielded and vulnerable residents through regular reassurance calls:

- 228 referrals from safe and well to date
- 100% matched with a volunteer to help support
- 211 called at least once

Many of our own staff also volunteered to work extra hours over weekends, bank holidays and at unsociable times to support calls to our shielded/ vulnerable residents.

We also supported a flyer drop for the scheme. This went to all households in the Central6 area, with further flyer circulation to other wards and communities via ward members and their volunteering arrangements.

More than 30,000 homes received a flyer.

Do you need help or support?

If you, or someone you know, is isolated and needs support to stay at home, we're here to help. Our safe and well service is available to anyone who might need a bit of extra help at the moment, during the coronavirus pandemic.

It's okay to ask for help

During these challenging times, some people will be okay and will have enough support around them. But some people might need a hand - and that's what safe and well is here for.

We can help make sure you receive essential items, such as food and prescriptions.

We all need a little extra help from time to time. Please get in touch if you, or someone you know, needs our help.

Get in touch

warrington.gov.uk/safeandwell
01925 442441 or **01925 442443**



Support for our residents, businesses and communities

PPE: support for our care providers and staff

PPE has been a long-standing and well-documented challenge throughout our response to the pandemic. After the council's leadership issued a public plea for donations, we were overwhelmed by support from our partners—including schools and businesses.

We set up a PPE coordination base at Irwell Road to ensure we had adequate oversight and control of distributing PPE to our care colleagues.

We have since been able to circulate adequate PPE to all front line staff and been an emergency provider of last resort to our private care homes, charities and funeral directors.

Although demand has fluctuated, we have managed almost 600k of PPE items to our care staff and partners.

Democracy and governance

Enabling our communities to continue to engage with our democratic processes has been of vital.

We have adopted a shift to remote/virtual formal council meetings, including Cabinet and Development Management Committee for the

first time. These have been facilitated by the development of new procedures and incorporating new technology.

We have also used remote meetings of the schools admissions appeal panel for the first time, using amended legislative procedures, and have worked with the courts to continue important cases digitally, including virtual court hearings.

Support for our communities: a summary



£32.4m (88%) of awards made to businesses via relief grants



64 referrals to Warrington Foodbank



4,308 food parcels handed out



Flyer drop to 30,000+ households

Adult social care—protecting our elderly and most vulnerable

It was clear from the outset that we needed to protect our elderly, frail and most vulnerable people and adult social care was pivotal in our initial response to coronavirus.

Adult social care services have responded by:

- Establishing Triage and Provider Response hubs, which were set up at an early stage and include dedicated email and telephone numbers for different groups of services to co-ordinate responses. The hub has an infrastructure in place to support the most vulnerable people in the community and has dealt with **976 contacts since mid-March**
- Escalating PPE issues early on to ensure a local, co-ordinated response was in place. Arrangements for mutual aid were rapidly put in place, including delivery to care homes in emergencies
- Providing strong leadership and support for care providers, through regular communications and guidance. From the beginning, we contacted individuals twice a week and all care provider teleconferences focused on specific service types (care homes, supported living, day services)
- Working with providers to develop emergency outbreak plans. This included setting up safe isolation homes, so people with learning disabilities can be cared for and self-isolate safely
- Working closely with homelessness and domestic abuse services to ensure they are stable and maintained
- Leading financial and support plans targeting care homes, alongside the CCG and Public Health, for homes that have seen their occupancy fall
- Providing additional therapeutic bed capacity to support hospital discharge. The hospital discharge team was successful in gaining the hospital's CEO award for their contribution to the hospital in creating bed capacity
- Establishing a rapid community response service to support people with rapid access (within two hours), enabling people to remain at home and avoiding a hospital attendance and/or admissions—157 people have benefited from the service, of which 92% have been supported to remain at home
- Putting in place financial measures and making payments to care providers in advance, to ease cash-flow issues. Since March, we have issued Phased Financial Grants of £1.75m to all key providers to cover the additional costs of managing COVID-19. This financial support was aligned with the CCG to make it easier for providers to manage



Adult social care—protecting our elderly and most vulnerable

- Creating additional Carecall capacity, through volunteers and redeployed staff to ensure a guaranteed 24/7 response
- Recruiting new adult social care staff through successful recruitment campaigns. We have recruited 13 staff to our Intermediate Care at Home service, 12 for our Intermediate Care bed-based unit at Padgate, two returning social workers and two casual Carecall operators, plus 10 candidates have been passed to external providers for possible recruitment. Much of this was made possible by converting the majority of the induction programme to e-learning at pace.
- We also supported care homes with testing for staff from April, as soon as it was made available to the North West region, and continue to support with testing for residents and staff
- Working with colleagues to establish the safe and well workstream, proactively contacting those identified as isolated or vulnerable, including older carers and people placed out of the area
- Supporting Creative Remedies to provide six online support sessions: music, performing arts, visual arts, meditation, read to relax and photography. This has provided mental health support to people in the community and has brought a sense of normality and structure to group members. It has also helped to bring some stability to their routine and alleviated some of the anxiety that

Adult social care: a summary



976 new contacts through Triage Hub



157 people have benefited from the community rapid response service, with 92% able to remain at home



13 new intermediate care at home recruits, 12 new Padgate House carers, two Carecall operators and two returning social workers



£1.75m grants made to care providers



Public Health

Providing Public Health leadership across the region has been a particular strength with our response to COVID-19.

We have worked closely across Cheshire and Merseyside to ensure our response to coronavirus has been focused on containing the spread as much as possible, and minimising the impact on our residents and services.

We have provided, through our Public Health service, vital data analysis, intelligence and modelling to inform the local response to COVID-19. We have also worked closely with Public Health England (PHE) and our infection control team to provide advice and local guidance for a range of services, to enable them to deal with issues responsively. This includes providing assured guidance to care homes, schools and workplaces.

In partnership with other departments, we established a team who contacted nearly 9,000 Warrington residents who are on the NHS shielding list to check they were okay or whether they needed any support. People that were identified as needing follow up support were referred to the safe and well service.

Following the prolonged lockdown and threat of a second wave of the virus, there has never been a more important time for the public to keep well and stay healthy. We have worked closely with LiveWire to ensure our lifestyles service continues to operate remotely delivering advice, guidance and support to keep active, eat well and quit smoking.

This has also played an important role in helping people recover from illness, and has supported people at home to keep active and socially connected.

We have also provided guidance and support for people to look after their mental health during lockdown and those experiencing bereavement.

After the current crisis is over, we will still need to take care of our mental wellbeing. We have therefore produced a range of information about COVID-19 and mental wellbeing for people who live or work in Warrington on happyoksad.org.uk. This information includes practical suggestions for working from home, information and advice for people still going into work and ideas for self-help, if you or members of your family are feeling anxious or worried.

Support for those with housing needs/rough sleepers

Those with housing needs often don't have phones or access to the internet, so we have continued to run our services with the office open from 10am to 12noon and 2pm to 4pm, Monday to Friday, at the Gateway, as well as providing our usual out of hours service.

A wide range of measures have been implemented to ensure that we have complied with the government's requirements on social distancing, with interview rooms cleaned every time they are used. In April 2020, we received 197 new applications. In May, that number stood at 235.



Public Health

Following the government's 'everyone in' announcement, we moved quickly to ensure suitable accommodation for our homeless/rough sleepers.

The staff and residents from Room at the Inn moved into the Travelodge Hotel from 2 April 2020. Colleagues conduct full comprehensive assessments for each person accommodated, which is then developed into a personal housing plan. Individual needs are then met by a wide range of commissioned services, for example drug and alcohol. These services are engaging with residents even throughout the pandemic, enabling them to address their various addictions.

We also conduct daily street walks to engage with rough sleepers who refuse to take up services and offers of accommodation.

We now hope to lay out plans to build on the success of Travelodge and provide offers of accommodation to those currently staying at the hotel.

Public protection

The public protection team has continued to play an important role in the fight against COVID-19.

We've spoken to more than 340 businesses about restrictions and have responded to concerns over social distancing in the workplace. The

service has also worked with the voluntary sector to ensure that food continues to reach the most vulnerable.

At the height of the pandemic there was a 350% increase in fly tipping and a 900% increase in bonfire complaints. This is a phenomenal amount of activity for a relatively small team but the service is committed to ensuring the public remain informed and protected.

The Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has paid credit to the support and approach of our public protection team.

Public health: a summary



Provided public health leadership and advice to region



Contacted more than 9,000 residents on shielded/vulnerable list



All homeless/people sleeping rough accommodated under government's 'everyone in' directive



NHS Test and Trace

It finally became clear in mid-May that there would be a very specific ask of councils to support the NHS Test and Trace scheme, despite initial indications to the contrary. The Council was only notified of its funding on 10 June and the approach is having to be developed at pace.

The Director of Public Health is to produce, agree and submit an Outbreak Control plan by the end of June for every place, which is to feature seven key themes:

Care homes and schools: planning for local outbreaks in care homes and schools (e.g. defining monitoring arrangements, potential scenarios and planning the required response)

High risk places, locations and communities: identifying and planning how to manage high risk places, locations and communities of interest (e.g. defining preventative measures and outbreak management strategies)

Local testing capacity: identifying methods for local testing to ensure a swift response that is accessible to the entire population (e.g. defining how to prioritise and manage deployment).

Contact tracing in complex settings: assessing local and regional

contact tracing capability in complex settings (e.g. identifying specific local complex communities, developing assumptions to estimate demand and options to scale capacity)

Data integration: integrating national and local data and scenario planning through the Joint Biosecurity Centre Playbook (e.g. data management planning, including data security, NHS data linkages)

Vulnerable people: supporting vulnerable local people to get help to self-isolate (e.g. facilitating NHS and local support, identifying relevant community groups) and ensuring services meet the needs of diverse communities

Local boards: establishing governance structures led by existing COVID-19 Health Protection Boards, in conjunction with local NHS organisations, and supported by existing Gold command forums, alongside a new member-led board to communicate with the general public.

Preparations are already well advanced in Warrington, and we are working with colleagues in Halton and across Cheshire to ensure that we have robust arrangements in place, despite the lack of resources and late notification to councils of their role.



Education, schools and early help

We are very proud that all schools have remained open to children with the exception of three of our settings, who have delivered a fully remote offer. We were clear we were maintaining 'bubbles' long before this was common terminology.

By 27 March, we had developed a 'hub and spoke' model for schools to use if they needed to close their building due to potential COVID-19 concerns to carry out a deep clean. This has been used at least three times and has meant that children have been able to continue to attend a school setting with the staff they know.

All schools and colleges have completed comprehensive risk assessments to support the expansion of their offer to priority groups set out in government guidance. We made the difficult decision to delay the wider reopening of our school settings, despite government advice to open on 1 June. We assessed, alongside our school leaders, the risks and other considerations beyond the much-publicised 'R factor', to come to a decision that reopening on 15 June would be preferable—so that we could guarantee with confidence that we had done all we can, alongside our schools, to create a safe learning environment for our pupils. We have so far reviewed 77 school COVID-19 risk assessments to support head teachers to enable a safe return for their pupils.

In early March, we agreed a school leadership group, made up of head teachers that were able to represent all schools and colleges in Warrington. This group of leaders have worked with the council every

day over the last three months to ensure all schools have been supported. It has been integral in creating our strategic direction and ensuring schools would be as cohesive as possible, and since the first formal meeting on the 20 March it has met 'virtually' 35 times.

We have issued a school survey every weekday since 27 March (including traditional holidays and bank holidays) which has allowed us to monitor the 'health' of schools regarding their staffing levels and student numbers. Part of the daily survey provides head teachers with the opportunity to ask questions. We have responded to these questions, through a shared-with-all 65 page Q&A document. We have answered in excess of 720 questions, ensuring as a council we are providing head teachers with the support they need in a time of great change and complexity.

We are also having fortnightly meetings with unions representing school staff, to ensure that any decisions we are making were going to address health and safety concerns unions were bound to have about their members.

We have also managed to fully deliver primary school offers on 16 April, with more children than ever being provided with their first preference school (94.5% first choice in 2020 compared to 90.5% in 2019).



Education, schools and early help

We have worked closely with children's social care to ensure that schools continue to play their crucial part in the safeguarding of all children, but especially the most vulnerable. We have shared registers of 'children with a social worker' with schools.

The returns have provided reassurance that schools are doing an excellent job and that attendance and safeguarding in Warrington are better than the national figures commented on by the children's commissioner. For example, on w/c 11 May, for all children with a social worker, 29% attended school at least once, with indicative national figures being between 5% and 15%. In the same week, for all children with a social worker, 86% of children either attended school or were contacted directly by school.

In total, the average daily pupil numbers in school are 700 prior to 8 June. The highest number was reported on 20 May at 1,095, and the lowest number was on the bank holiday 25 May at 155 pupils in school. The regional Schools Commissioner Officer has commended our collaborative approach with our schools.

The attendance and education safeguarding teams have still been providing support, advice and guidance to schools and parents/carers during the lockdown period, including an advice line, which is staffed during school hours. The teams have been also working with Children's Social Care and Early Help to help ensure that communication concerning vulnerable children is maintained between the council and schools.

Free school meals

Schools have been provided with school meals throughout lockdown in the form of a healthy and nutritious packed lunch for all children (including bank holidays and traditional half term).

Those children on free schools meals (FSM) that have not attended school have been provided with food vouchers, even during the holidays.

Assessment of FSM eligibility has been carried out over the phone, to speed up the process for those most in need.

Our School Meals Service has produced nearly 15,000 free school meals for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers in school since the lockdown started (up until end of May).

SEND services

Our SENDIASS service has continued to support our parents of SEND children, being a powerful advocate for them. The service has produced factsheets and booklets and developed a four week SEND course for parents and professionals. Warrington has been commended by our parents forum for not using the easements in current legislation to deliver a reduced offer to our children and families.



Education, schools and early help

Early help

All family support workers have worked hard to engage with families virtually. This has enabled all open cases to be maintained at the same level of need and haven't required social care interventions.

The early help support team has been working hard to increase the amount of assessments completed with children, young people and families to ensure they are being supported. Completed assessments have increased to 220.

Our parenting offer of advice and guidance continues as our parenting leads are undertaking video calls and telephone calls with parents to offer support and strategies.

The parenting leads have also been very creative in the ways in which they have offered support and have created a top tip sheet and various YouTube clips to support children, young people and families. They have worked hard to look at how we can still offer our evidence-based parenting programmes virtually to parents and carers.

Our children's centre staff have also created several YouTube clips on sessions, like baby sing- a-longs. This virtual way of working is helping families while in isolation have fun with their children and helping with home learning.

The performance team that support our troubled families programme has smashed their previous 'payment by results' claims by completing 235 claims this quarter. This has brought us to a total of 968, 77.5% of our overall target. This means we've doubled the number of 'payment by results' claimed in the last 12 months.

We have continued to launch a new service called 'Restore' in April. This is an intensive scheme where pregnant women, their unborn children and families will be supported, up until the unborn child's fifth birthday. This support includes early help assessments, joint work with social care, housing, health and parenting. Uptake has been positive with five families already being supported by the project.

The early help youth service has joined up with families first service to offer an 'edge of care outreach hub' which is available at Orford Youth Base. This provision has been accessible for children and young people in Warrington since mid-April. The Outreach Hub has offered an intervention for those children and young people who are identified as high risk of entering care and/or are recognised as high risk of harm through the complex safeguarding forum CSOG.

Education, schools and early help

Youth service

The Youth Service has developed a virtual timetable, offering a range of activities for continued engagement of young people.

The service has also continued sessional delivery of Youth Voice (Impact) and TAGS (LGBTQ) group work sessions online, offering peer support and a resource development programme. Impact have also developed a range of peer support advice, information and guidance resources for young people and professionals during lockdown.

The youth work management team have developed a comprehensive online training offer to upskill the youth support workforce during lockdown.

Preparation for adulthood—transition

Social workers and access to learning officers have made regular welfare checks on all young people (16+) with SEND and their families who are known to the service.

They have assessed the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on the families' physical and emotional wellbeing and their resilience. Where necessary, increases in packages of care have been made to support complex, risky situations.

Pre-schools and day nurseries

31.7% of non-school nurseries/pre-schools remained open and cared for an average of 186 children per day, of which an average of seven were vulnerable. 11.6% of childminders remained open and they cared for an average of 25 children per day, of which two were vulnerable.

64.2% of our school nurseries remained open to nursery age children. They cared for an average of 51 children per day, of which 19 were vulnerable.

Education, schools and early years: a summary



More than 15,000 free school meals provided



29% of children with a social worker attended school, compared to variable national average of 5% - 15%



Daily contact with school leaders across the borough



94.5% of primary children allocated first choice school preference

Children's services

It's been an incredibly important and busy time in children's services while responding to COVID-19. Supporting children and families, particularly during the pandemic period, has been a key priority.

Children's Social Care developed a risk assessment and decision making tool to ensure that those children and families that need to be seen are seen safely. Face to face visits to families have continued to take place whenever it is safe and possible to do so.

Social workers are creative in their approach to seeing children where they can't be seen face to face, making use of direct work that can be completed virtually via Skype and Whatsapp. We have had positive feedback from some young people saying they have enjoyed speaking with their social workers in this way and even after the pandemic period we will look to leverage digital tools to communicate with our young people.

PPE has been a challenge for Children's Social Care, like many others. We have followed PHE guidance and worked with colleagues in Public Health to determine the approach we have taken to visits with PPE.

Our children in care have been unable to have spend time with their families. However, we have been using technology so children are seeing their family via video calls.

Importantly, multi-agency meetings are also continuing, to ensure families are receiving the support they need. Most of these meetings are taking place virtually.

April 2020 saw a 35% reduction in contacts to the MASH (front door of Children's Social Care) compared to the same period last year. There has been a particular decrease in the number of contacts to MASH from schools and health partners. There has been increase in contacts and the number of children progressing to referral in May.

In response to potential increases in pressure on our residential teams, we opened a new children's home in 24 hours which is being registered with Ofsted. We have prioritised our residential service as a whole and have continued to ensure it is properly staffed as a priority with clear contingency plans.

Children's services

The Edge of Care Hub opened in mid-April in response to potential increased risks for adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. A small team of Families First and Youth Workers undertake support to children in need of immediate 'edge of care' support, which works to keep young people at risk of going into care with their families.

A young person, working with the Edge of Care Hub, said:

"I found it better to talk about what's going on in my mind and feel heard here. I have a better understanding to reasons why I make my decisions and what my triggers are. I have not gone missing since working with you. I did have a wobble for one day but that was when the centre was closed, and I was not missing from home. I feel supported and never judged. I feel valued."

We are also ensuring our staff are getting the support they need during these challenging circumstances. For example, lunchtime socials are on offer to those who wish to join. We use systemic approaches to explore some of the challenges we are currently facing. The group helps children's services management identify those workers who perhaps are showing signs that they are particularly struggling. 'Check-ins' are undertaken with those who do not routinely attend the lunchtime socials, so that support can be offered if needed.

We are also in touch with most of our care leavers on a weekly basis. We have purchased phone credit for care leavers who have needed it,

which ensures their personal advisors are able to keep in regular contact.

Finally, we have increased our maintenance payments for care leavers by £20 a week and have provided foodbank vouchers and financial support for food, gas and electric when needed.

Children's services: a summary



Opened a new, temporary Edge of Care facility to support young people at risk of going into care



New children's home opened within 24 hours to respond to possible additional demand during lockdown



Increased maintenance payments for care leavers by £20 per week

Transport and environment

Despite the constraints of lockdown and our response to COVID-19, transport and environment teams have ensured that our highways, building control and environment services have continued to operate.

Highways asset management and street works

The Highway Asset Maintenance Team has continued to deliver highway maintenance services while also providing support to other service areas. Highway inspection and maintenance has continued throughout with the team working in partnership with our term maintenance contractor Tarmac to ensure essential works have continued. The team has:

- Walked and inspected 900km of highway
- Investigated and actioned 472 public highway related enquiries
- Completed 1,109 highway safety repairs
- Attended 69 emergency callouts
- Fixed 291 street lighting issues reported
- Completed 310 electrical surveys, in addition to column, lantern and signpost replacements
- Cleansed 2,429 gullies
- Swept 260km of highways
- Deep cleansed five strategic gateways
- Continued to coordinate and inspect street works permits

Engineering and flood risk

Since COVID-19 restrictions were introduced, the service has adapted to new methods of delivery and has completed six major resurfacing schemes at a total cost of £900K.

The team also made the decision to amend the work programme to deliver critical projects in rural areas during the dry weather.

These included:

- Seven key roads throughout Warrington at a total cost of £350K
- Five bridge projects at a total cost of £400K
- Flood risk management at major junction at a cost of £180K

The total cost of these essential projects, delivered Since 23 March, currently stand at £1.82m.

Building control

The full building control service has continued throughout. All plans are being processed in the normal way, with customer contact with building control via email and phone to enable approvals to be issued.

Site inspections are received daily and the same-day inspection service has been maintained. All dangerous structures have also been attended to.



Transport and environment

Transport for Warrington

Local transport restart work commenced in early April at the height of the lockdown – concentrating on preparing an extensive series of measures to promote walking and cycling and to enable social distancing. An application has been made to draw down Emergency Active Travel Funding from the Department for Transport (DfT) to help facilitate this.

We have been in constant contact with all local bus operators to help them to work towards the restoration of full timetables, which are planned to be in place by the end of June. We have used the emergency DfT COVID-19 bus service support grant funding to do this. We have also introduced an extensive range of measures to be introduced on buses, at stops and at the bus interchange and we're working with our operators to make travel as safe as possible.

With preparations in hand for the return of children to schools across the borough, we're assessing what adjustments are needed to transport provision to accommodate this.

The team has also been maintaining traffic signals and controls and have attended a total of 331 faults and carried out 61 periodic inspections.

Infrastructure Delivery

Work to deliver a range of strategic transport schemes have continued to progress on site despite the pandemic. Across this portfolio of schemes, officers have worked with a number of contractors to agree revised methodologies to allow construction to continue, whilst ensuring compliance with Public Health England guidance.

This proactive approach has been key to mitigating delay on completion of these schemes, whilst also minimising additional expenditure incurred as a result of COVID-19.

Project teams have also taken advantage of reduced traffic levels to reschedule some activities to take place earlier than originally planned to help minimise future disruption caused by schemes as lockdown eases.

We have also managed the safe reopening of Gatewarth and Woolston Community Recycling Centres (CRCs), with increased footfall and double the amount of vehicles compared to previous years.

Transport and environment

Environment services

Environment services have played a fundamental role in providing support and continuity across the borough, with many front line services continue to operate—albeit in different ways.

A priority for environment services has been continuing the full waste collection service across all three waste streams. The waste service has:

- Collected 10.5% more residual waste than the same period in 2019/20
- Collected 18% more recycle waste than the same period in 2019/20
- Collected 13% more green waste than the same period in 2019/20

To ensure that the kerbside collection service could continue, we have temporarily redeployed colleagues to support. We have also ensured social distancing during collections by having two bin crew in the cab, with another member of the crew following in one of our small fleet of vans/cars.

Environment Services have also continued to maintain public open spaces and parkland. This has ensured these areas have been available to the public to use as part of daily exercise and also prevented the

borough becoming unkempt, preventing future maintenance issues.

Our Building Cleaning team supported our schools in maintaining education provision for our key workers. They have provided support to the homeless service and other council services in continuing to keep buildings and offices clean. They have also supported several vulnerable people in cleaning their homes after private providers withdrew.

The fleet and facility team have played an important role in maintaining our vehicles plant and machinery and have delivered our front line service provision by working a double shift system.

The pest control service has also continued visits to clients during the pandemic managing each individual incident.



Transport and environment

Transport and environment: a summary



900k highways walked and inspected



Planning and implementing transport and public area 'restart' as part of reopening measures



1,109 highway safety repairs completed



310 electrical surveys completed



472 public highway enquiries investigated and 69 emergency callouts attended to



£900k of major resurfacing schemes delivered



Maintained all three waste streams of kerbside collection



Successfully reopened two CRCs



2,429 gullies cleansed and a continued cleaning service has remained to provide ongoing support to services



Provided bereavement services throughout the pandemic



Leisure, culture and lifestyle

Leisure

21 live exercise sessions have been delivered on Facebook and Instagram by LiveWire instructors so that residents can workout at any time in the comfort of their own home. On Facebook, these sessions have attracted 3,758 views, 53,696 reaches and 657 likes.

LiveWire members have also been able to sign up and follow Les Mills online workouts including Bodypump, Bodycombat and Bodybalance for free. The lifestyle team has delivered eight free weekly exercise sessions such as chair-based exercise, low-impact exercise and Tai Chi to help keep people moving, Nine weekly 'Kitchen Talks' have been delivered on social media covering healthy meal recipes, as well as advice on keeping well and healthy.

Libraries

There has been an outstanding 420% increase in eBook borrowing through the library service (3,927 extras loans). This online offering has attracted 425 new members.

Since April, LiveWire libraries have posted a daily update on various social media channels based on various themes.

Delivered by:



Posts include:

- eBook and e-audio adult and children's book reviews
- coding club activities
- virtual reading groups
- online resources to support home schooling
- Reading for wellbeing including mood-boosting books and daily online reading sessions
- Links to resources for under 5's including rhyme and story times
- LEGO clubs and challenges

The Home Library Service has continued as a befriending service with the library team regularly contacting the service's 120 clients and accompanying volunteers—all of whom fall into one of the government's vulnerable categories—to identify if any of them require any support or assistance. Then, where necessary, these people have been signposted into the relevant support services.

Culture

Culture Warrington has used its social media channels to provide a much needed cultural offer online. These activities included some of our most popular in-house activities such as Crafternoons, the #MuseumsFromHome campaign and virtual VE day celebrations.

Leisure, culture and lifestyle

We posted a special VE Day Crafternoon activity, a playlist of war-time music and links to the VE Day concert at the Royal Albert Hall. We also began a #WarringtonTogether campaign to create a community quilt!

We also supported Velocity Dance in promoting their NHS appreciation dance #danceforourstars, which took place every Thursday after the NHS clap for seven weeks from the 16 April to the 28 May. 215 people performed the dance online from ages 4-75, consisting of various community dance/performing arts schools, high school and colleges from Warrington and small groups and individuals from throughout the North West, reaching as far as Yorkshire, Wales and Coventry. The online choreography tutorial received almost 9,000 views and each dance group learnt the choreography in their zoom classes each week.

One key element of online engagement was this year's Get Creative Festival, which took place on Culture Warrington's social media. This campaign saw artists and creative people from across Warrington coming together to celebrate and share their talents with people at home.

Culture Warrington was awarded £31,142 through the Arts Council emergency grant funding to develop a enhanced digital platform for WMAG, with two large commissions for two local Warrington Artists

Delivered by:



and five smaller commissions for local artists to create new work based upon the collection in WMAG.

Culture Warrington also supported three artists (living/working in Warrington) with their own ACE emergency grant funding applications. All three were successful.

Leisure, culture and lifestyle: a summary

-  21 live exercise sessions hosted online
-  420% increase in eBook borrowing
-  £31k funding for WMAG digital presence
-  215 people joined #danceforourstars initiative



Recovery

We will bring forward to Cabinet in September our 'recovery plan' for Warrington which will have focus on people, place and the organisation, and will also be aligned to our wider Corporate Strategy and priorities.

These are unprecedented times, but we can be proud of the way the people of Warrington have responded to this national emergency, proud of the way that the council has supported our community, and we must look to the future with the ambition to ensure that Warrington continues to thrive, despite the huge national challenges we face.

