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London Borough of Bromley

PART ONE - PUBLIC

Decision Maker: EXECUTIVE

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Decision Type: Non-Urgent Executive Non-Key

Title: CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE REPORT

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Ward: All Wards

1. Reason for report

This report provides the Executive with key updates on behalf of the senior leadership team across a number of areas:

- Our response to the Covid-19 pandemic
- COVID-19 Staff Wellbeing Survey
- Return to office working approach
- Arrangements for committee meetings
- Economic Development strategy for 2021 - 2031

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

The Executive is recommended to note the report.

3. COMMENTARY

3.1 This report provides the Executive with key updates on behalf of the senior leadership team:

- Our local area Covid-19 response
- COVID-19 Staff Wellbeing Survey
- Return to work approach
- Arrangements for committee meetings
- Economic development and restarting the economy

3.2 Covid-19 response

3.3 As a local authority, we continue to work closely with our residents, local businesses, partner organisations and the voluntary and community sector, to ensure an ongoing effective and robust response to the Covid-19 crisis as we move steadily along the Government's four-step roadmap out of lockdown.

3.4 As part of this, we are evaluating the response across all Covid-19 programmes and identifying where the following workstreams can be delivered by business-as-usual services, reducing our financial exposure to Covid-19 associated costs. However, the arrangements will be subject to regular review to ensure that we can scale up our response programmes depending on ongoing case rates in the borough.

3.5 In Bromley, the Council's governance arrangements for the COVID-19 strategic response programme have been as follows:

- The Leader of the Council is the strategic sponsor and lead for the Council's response
- The Chief Executive maintains operational leadership on a daily basis
- Executive Portfolio Holder for Care and Health maintains leadership at the political level with the Deputy Leader and the Executive acting as critical friends.
- Regular briefings to elected members and MPs

3.6 The weekly COVID-19 strategic group is chaired by the Chief Executive and is attended by all Directors, as well as a number of key senior officers. The purpose of this group is to set the strategic response to the crisis, to ensure continued service provision in all key areas across the Council and to oversee the delivery of the communications plan for members, staff and residents.

3.7 The Council has implemented a robust internal and external communications and engagement strategy to ensure that key internal and external stakeholders are engaged and informed on our local response to COVID-19.

3.8 Internal communications activities have included:

- Online COVID-19 portal established on the intranet containing all staff updates for easy reference
- Regular all staff emails sent from the Chief Executive during the week to keep staff informed
- Comprehensive and regular updates highlighting advice on remote working, rollout of training, mental health and wellbeing advice and support for staff, how managers can support their teams and staff and communication on infection control from Public Health
- Long-term focus of internal communications is ensuring that staff feel informed and engaged on the development of the Council's response and have easy access to information

- COVID-19 updates included in the monthly Transforming Bromley Newsletter.
- Daily internal email briefings to Members, which have supported Members to inform residents
- Staff survey on COVID-19

3.9 External communications activities have included:

- COVID-19 portal established on the website
- Regular service updates on service pages linked to the COVID-19 page for easy reference
- Volunteer sign up button and form established on website
- Assistance sign up button and form established on website
- Business support button and form established on website
- News releases as required to cover volunteering, service, service updates and other developments.
- Business e-bulletin
- Social media – Twitter and Facebook to reflect key messages
- E-newsletter – Update – sent to 70,000 plus residents with the ability to subscribe and supplemented by a paper newsletter to ensure all residents have received key updates
- Email and SMS messages to vulnerable Shielding residents to make sure they are getting the help they need
- Weekly briefings to the borough’s local MPs
- Volunteer newsletter

3.10 Covid-19 cases - local context

3.11 As at 11 May, our Public Health intelligence data confirmed that the rate of new COVID-19 cases in the borough is lower the London average. Our 7-day case infection rate per 100,000 people is 13.8, compared to the London average of 18.6.

3.12 As at 11 May, we had recorded a cumulative total of 24,446 positive COVID-19 cases to date in the borough. As this figure is based on confirmed cases only as we are not testing everyone, it is important to treat these figures with caution.

3.13 As at 8 May, an estimated 765 people have lost their lives from COVID-19 related deaths registered in Bromley.

3.14 Vaccination programme in Bromley and management of Bromley Civic Centre mass vaccination site

3.15 The rollout of the vaccination programme in Bromley is led by the NHS and the oversight and strategic leadership for its delivery sits with the South East London (SEL) CCG.

3.11 At a South East London level, home to nearly 2 million people, over one million vaccine doses have now been delivered. As a local authority, Bromley is performing well with a high uptake across all eligible age cohorts. As at 10 May, all age cohorts aged 65+ and clinically extremely vulnerable residents have seen a first dose uptake above 90%. Among eligible residents aged 50 - 65, we have seen a first dose uptake above 80% and we have so far seen an uptake above 60% for eligible residents aged 40 - 49.

3.16 In Bromley, we are providing vaccination services across the following sites:

Local Vaccination Services (Designated Sites)

- Oak Parks

- Beckenham Beacon
- London Lane
- St Edward's Church, Mottingham
- West Wickham & Shirley Baptist Church
- Orpington Health and Wellbeing Centre
- Satellites in GP practices and community settings

Pharmacies

- Cray Hill
- Eldred Drive

Mass Vaccination Site

- Civic Centre

Hospital Hub

- PRUH

3.17 We are also working hard to address COVID-19 vaccination uptake through our Vaccine Hesitancy Taskforce in the following groups;;

- **Ethnicity** - uptake is lower in Black Caribbean and Black African groups
- **Deprivation** - uptake is lower in areas of deprivation in the borough (Penge & Anerley, The Crays, Mottingham)
- **People with serious mental illness**
- **Care home staff**

3.18 Activities to support uptake among these groups include:

- Two pharmacy vaccination sites in the Crays
- Regular satellite clinic at Al-Emaan Centre Mosque in Keston
- Roving team operating a weekly clinic in targeted locations across the borough, trailed with localised communications
- Pop Up at Penge Library 12 May
- VaxiTaxi Event in Penge on 25 May

3.19 We established a vaccination centre at the Bromley Civic Centre site in March 2021 which is overseen by Kings NHS Trust. As at 30 April, over 30,000 first dose vaccinations have been delivered from the Civic Centre site, which will continue to run until the end of September.

3.20 Local authority testing and community collection testing programme

3.21 A lateral flow testing (LFT) rapid testing programme was established by the Council in January 2021 to reduce the spread of COVID-19 across the borough through testing of asymptomatic staff working in the community who may be COVID-19 positive but show no symptoms. The programme was designed to protect our frontline services and limit transmission where any staff are working face-to-face with the public.

3.22 During the first phase of our LFT programme from January to April 2021, 23,975 tests were booked at our two rapid testing centre sites (Bromley Civic Centre and Kenwood Adult Education Centre). 55% of these tests were carried out at the Civic Centre site.

3.23 The test outcome analysis for the sites was as follows:

- 177 positive results were recorded across the two centres, representing a cumulative positive rate of 0.7% of all tests.

- Approximately half of all positive tests were recorded in the first three weeks of the testing programme.
- 129 of the 177 positives recorded related to Bromley residents (73%)
- Seven in every ten bookings were for women within the Bromley resident population, and men continue to be proportionally under-represented in testing. Men are more likely to test positive (52% of the positives), which is an overrepresentation of males in comparison to the test administered at the two sites by 17%.
- The 40-49 year old age group has returned the greatest number of positives.
- For those that tested positive and supplied their employment details, the majority work in the childcare, education and training sector (31%).

3.24 For the second phase of our LFT programme which began on 6 April, we moved our Civic Centre site to a new location to accommodate arrangements for the GLA elections and have continued a service at our Kentwood Centre Site. Our Civic Centre site is open 5 days a week with bookable appointments from 8.30am - 3.30pm. Our Kentwood Adult Education Centre site also offers appointments 5 days a week from 12.30pm - 7.30pm. As at 11 May, we have offered over 2,800 tests with a 0.1% positivity rate.

3.25 We are also providing a community click and collect service for home testing at both sites, as well as providing two additional services at our Mottingham and Cotmandene Learning Shops from 6 April. A Pharmacy Collect service for home testing kits has commenced within Bromley with 58 pharmacies signed up, and we will continue to closely monitor the impact of this on our local authority testing and community collection centres.

3.26 **Operation Shielding, Volunteering and Assistance Programme**

3.27 The Shielding, Volunteering and Assistance programme has been quiet since the pausing of the national shielding measures at the end of March and the lifting of lockdown restrictions. The assistance line will be diverted to Customer Services after Friday 28 May. Support will still be available for anyone that needs it, for example via signposting to telephone or online shopping services or referral to the voluntary sector for direct food support for those in financial crisis. Medicine delivery services are operating from all pharmacies for anyone that needs to isolate as a COVID-19 patient or close contact.

3.28 A Volunteering Task Force has been established to ensure a smooth transition of the support offered by the programme over to the voluntary sector. The 4600+ volunteers that came forward to help will be invited to a thank you event in early June. They will be invited to continue volunteering in the borough for one of the 300+ voluntary and community sector organisations who have many opportunities to offer.

3.29 A focus for the Task Force will be ensuring the Council addresses the feelings of loneliness and social isolation that have worsened for some residents during the pandemic, by developing a range of events and support options around befriending, along with a loneliness strategy and a repeat of the successful loneliness summit held in 2019. Seconded council staff that were assigned to this COVID-19 response programme are returning to business as usual activities from June but are all committed to returning to the programme should it need to re-mobilise in the event of future shielding restrictions being implemented.

3.30 All activities delivered under this programme (equipment and direct food support to clinically extremely vulnerable residents) were fully funded through COVID-19 grants, given that all programme staff were seconded (the majority were part time on the programme with no backfill costs).

3.31 Contact Tracing Programme

3.32 Our local Contact Tracing programme continues but with far lower case volumes than were seen at the peak of the second wave. In January, over 100 cases were being received locally per day (cases that the national Test and Trace team had been unable to contact), but the team were able to undertake all required calls. All staff working on the programme are seconded part time, with business-as-usual continuing with no backfill costs. In this financial year, there has been no additional expenditure associated with the Contact Tracing programme and the Self-Isolation Support Grant received has been used to cover the revenue staffing costs of officers working on the programme. The success rate of the programme in terms of contact with patients continues to be 88% overall – this has consistently been one of the highest performing boroughs.

3.33 Additional requirements have been placed on all London Contact Tracing teams during May, including enhanced contact tracing as part of 'Operation Eagle'. The focus is on reaching priority cases in areas where variants of concern have been found. This requires additional questions to be asked of some cases and for the weekend service to be stepped up once more. In addition, a door knocking process has been introduced for cases that cannot be reached by phone.

3.34 All of these additional measures are at no additional cost to the Council, as previously mobilised contact tracing staff have all been trained on the new processes and are remobilised on calls as volumes require. During June, plans will be made for the programme leadership team to return to business as usual roles and for this programme to move into business as usual service delivery in public health as we move from the pandemic to endemic stage in the UK.

3.35 Surge testing programme

3.36 Alongside enhanced contact tracing, one of the key methods to contain outbreaks of more contagious Covid-19 variants in local communities is surge testing, a programme of increased testing upon identification of cases linked to these variants. A number of London local authorities have already undertaken surge testing for Covid-19 variants. These surge testing programmes are undertaken in partnership with NHS Test and Trace, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), and Public Health England (PHE).

3.37 In Bromley, we have a robust surge testing strategy and operational plan that informs the Council's rapid response for identified cases of Covid-19 variants within the borough.

3.38 Working closely with PHE, a Surge Testing Programme Board has been established to:

- Oversee the operational plan
- Identify key personnel required to deliver the plan
- Ensure that key resources are available to support the plan delivery
- Ensure that all PHE clinical guidance is followed
- Report data to the senior leadership team, the Executive, PHE and DHSC.

3.39 The operational plan will support the implementation of localised surge testing and is tailored to support any part of Bromley. A supporting communication plan will include how best to engage with the community to ensure all those in the identified postcode(s) participate.

3.40 During surge testing, members of the public should get a test for coronavirus if they:

- live in targeted locations within one of the postcode areas notified by the Department for Health and Social Care

- are aged 16 years or over.

- 3.41 This is requested even if the resident has no COVID-19 symptoms; has received either a single or both doses of a COVID-19 vaccination; and has tested positive for COVID-19 previously. However, anyone who has tested positive within the last 90 days of the surge testing programme does not need to be tested.
- 3.42 All households including care homes and other institutions within the identified postcode area will be provided with access to a PCR test through either home testing kits or mobile testing sites. After the test has been taken and the results analysed, all positive test results will be sent to a laboratory for genomic sequencing, which means analysing the virus sample from the diagnosed patient and comparing it to other cases in the community.
- 3.43 Normal isolation rules will apply to the individual and members of their same household. Public Health England will also carry out enhanced tracing of close contacts for those with positive test results.
- 3.44 Public protection and enforcement**
- 3.45 On 4 January 2021, the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown for England, effectively closing all non-essential retail, pubs and restaurants, outdoor recreations and all close contact services (hairdressers and barbers etc). Restrictions did allow for the provision of click and collect and takeaway food.
- 3.46 Public Protection officers, made up of Trading Standards, Environmental health, Licensing and Health & Safety officers, have been tasked with the enforcement of all COVID regulations since the start of the pandemic. During the national lockdown, officers maintained a visible presence in the borough to monitor and enforce compliance with the restrictions. This required surveillance visits of all retail areas to ensure non-essential businesses remained closed, and those open for takeaway and click & collect, as well as individual interactions with businesses where needed.
- 3.47 From 4 January to 4 April, our officers completed 16,317 surveillance visits, visited or revisited 584 businesses, and issued 20 written notices.
- 3.48 On 12 April, outdoor hospitality reopened, including pubs, cafes and restaurants. Our public protection service has endeavoured to ensure that the Government's guidance is applied proportionately and consistently in our borough to support businesses to reopen safely and have applied flexible interpretations of this rule wherever possible.
- 3.49 Further easing also allowed the re-opening of non-essential retail, personal care premises such as hairdressers, beauty and nail salons and indoor leisure facilities such as gyms and spas, the majority of outdoor settings and attractions, including outdoor hospitality, zoos, theme parks, drive-in cinemas and drive-in performances events.
- 3.50 From 12 April to 15 May, our officers undertook over a thousand Covid-secure/business closure compliance visits or checks. We also undertook 166 follow-up contacts, via email, telephone or distribution of advice materials. Our compliance rate in Bromley was 87.6% and we issued 19 written notices or warnings. The main non-compliance issues related to a lack of understanding of the requirements of track & trace, the lack of PPE and the use of inappropriate outdoor shelters by hospitality venues. In most cases verbal advice enabled the business to improve, but in some circumstances a written warning was issued, and where this did not result in the desired improvement it was followed by a statutory prohibition notice. One fixed penalty was issued.

3.51 On 17 May, further easing of Covid-19 restrictions permitted most businesses in all but the highest risk sectors to reopen. In all sectors, Covid-secure guidance will remain in place and businesses may not cater for groups larger than the legal limits.

3.52 In particular, the return of indoor hospitality will still be subject to restrictions, such as track & trace and social distancing, table service and the rule of six. Re-opening safely presents a management challenge to operators and regulators alike and we will continue to work in partnership with police, local authority colleagues and our businesses to ensure the public are safe.

3.53 COVID-19 payments to businesses and residents

3.54 Since the start of the pandemic, over £142 million of grant funding from Government has been distributed through the Council to support 12,000 residents and over 16,000 payments have been made to businesses who have been hardest hit by the pandemic with work continuing during the current government restrictions.

3.55 As at 12 May 2021, we have made over 12,600 payments through the mandatory grant scheme totalling £77.2m. Additionally, we have distributed £55m in retail relief to other eligible businesses, £1.8m of Council Tax relief through the Hardship Fund to economically vulnerable residents, and £8.2m in discretionary business grant payments to over 4,000 applicants.

3.56 We have also delivered over 550 test and trace support payments of £500 to eligible people on low incomes who are unable to work from home if required to self-isolate.

3.57 Impact of COVID-19 on the Bromley population

3.58 Our Public Health team is in the process of drafting a chapter to supplement our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) to assess and summarise the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Bromley population across all ages, as well as any health inequalities that have emerged or been further exacerbated by the pandemic. This JSNA chapter will be taken to the Health and Wellbeing Board later this year.

3.59 Further to this, we are drafting a report which will highlight the key overall achievements of our local area response to the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the key recovery actions that will be delivered to address the medium and long-term impact of Covid-19 on the Bromley population. This report will also come to Members for approval later on this year.

3.60 COVID-19 Staff Wellbeing Survey

3.61 Further to the initial COVID-19 Staff Wellbeing Survey in May 2020, an additional survey was carried out in February 2021 to explore and capture staff views on the following topics:

- The experiences of new starters who have joined the organisation during the COVID-19 pandemic
- The views and experiences of staff regarding long-term remote/office working
- The effectiveness of our IT transformation programme rollout
- The impact of our COVID-19 support work to promote good staff wellbeing.

3.62 Over 1,041 members of staff who completed the survey, representing 56% of the Council's workforce and an increase on the response rate to the previous survey (975 colleagues or 55% of the workforce).

3.63 The key findings are as follows:

- 97% of respondents feel they are doing meaningful work for the Council and 93% would speak positively to others when talking about the Council.
- The Council's leadership team was also widely praised, particularly for the recent focus in communications on staff wellbeing and our commitment to equality and inclusion in the workplace.
- The vast majority of staff are working remotely, with 70% working remotely all the time and only 5% performing their work functions in the office or in the community.
- Staff generally felt they were adapting well to working from home, with 93% feeling they had built confidence with remote working.
- Following COVID-19, most staff suggested they would like to split their time between remote and office working (78%) in line with business needs.
- The Council's wellbeing support offer was positively received by respondents throughout the survey. However, 56% of respondents stated that they struggled at times to take care of either their physical or mental health. Many colleagues also indicated that they were feeling disconnected from their teams, with 30% of staff stated that they have often felt lonely or isolated during the pandemic. These are some of the key areas that will be addressed in the staff survey action plan to ensure we are doing everything possible to take care of our staff.
- 86% of respondents indicated that they had received IT equipment in the rollout, with 88%, believing it has improved their ability to work from home, which is reassuring considering the scale of the shift to remote working in the last year.

3.64 A series of HR engagement sessions with staff on the findings of the survey and actions for improvement to further support staff in the medium to long term will be delivered in May and June.

3.65 Return to office working approach

3.66 In line with the Government's four-step plan to ease COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, the current expectation is that colleagues will be able to return to work in the office from 21 June.

3.67 The senior leadership team, in partnership with elected Members, would like to provide clarity and reassurance to all officers through the key principles that will inform our return to work approach:

- As outlined in the Transforming Bromley roadmap, we are committed to agile and smarter working. Arrangements for staff working from home are set out in the Council's flexible and agile working policies.
- In line with Government requirements, we encourage staff working from the office to partake in twice-weekly LFT tests either in their own homes or at the test site at the Civic Centre.
- The leadership team expects staff to adopt a hybrid working approach in line with the core business needs of their service – this was echoed in the recent staff survey where 78% of staff said they would like to adopt a hybrid way of working after the pandemic.
- Line managers are responsible for deciding the working patterns of their staff based on the needs of our residents. Staff are encouraged and empowered to work flexibly and agilely without compromising service delivery, but line managers must strive to find the right balance.
- We expect all managers to have open and honest discussions with their teams and direct reports to find appropriate hybrid working solutions that align with core business

needs, while also empowering staff to exert some degree of choice and flexibility over their working arrangements.

- Given our duty of care to staff, line managers are expected to “keep in touch” with their direct reports both when in the office and when working away from the office including home/agile working.
- We will adhere to best practice in Covid-19 infection control principles for office-based working in line with central Government guidance as at 21 June. In this, we will be guided by our public health colleagues and those with clinical infection control expertise to advise on how this can be done safely and with appropriate risk assessments in place for staff.
- We will ensure that the cleanliness of all offices, appliances and workstations is maintained to meet public health guidance.

3.68 In terms of practical arrangements, we will deliver the following activities to support staff in their return to the office:

- We will run ‘Return to Work Safely’ seminars through our HR Workforce Development team with support from our public health colleagues, including clinical staff from the NHS to address anxiety and fear about returning to the work place, so that colleagues can ask any key questions or raise personal concerns in the run up to 21 June.
- We will issue a detailed ‘Return to Work Handbook’, setting out the need to maintain social distancing, have appropriate office ventilation and arrangements for booking desks in Covid-19 secure areas.
- We will introduce a desk booking system to ensure social distancing and ventilation. Desks can be booked in advance through this system. We have agreed a maximum desk/office occupancy ratio of 50/50.
- In line with Government guidance regarding the return to office working after June 21, it is expected that wearing a face mask/face covering will no longer be mandatory. However, staff may wish to continue to wear a face mask/face covering in line with Covid-19 infection control principles. This matter will be addressed in our ‘Return to Work Safely’ seminars.
- We will provide relevant hand sanitising gels to our staff, but also encourage all staff to wash their hands regularly and follow public health advice.
- We expect all staff to follow the social distancing measures that are in place at their workstations.

3.69 Return to physical committee meetings

3.70 As the COVID-19 regulation that permitted local authorities in England to hold virtual council meetings has now lapsed, all formal meetings of the Council from 7 May must now be held as physical meetings.

3.71 A report seeking a steer for the arrangements for the physical return to committee meetings will be taken by Democratic Services for decision at a special General Purposes and Licensing meeting on 26 May.

3.72 Economic development

3.73 We are in the process of drafting our Economic Strategy for 2021-2031, which will support the recovery of the local economy in Bromley over the next decade. The draft strategy sets out the 7 proposed key priorities and aspirations:

1. **Education and Skills:** our residents have access to the right opportunities for skills and education that will ensure healthy employment in the future

2. **Employment Spaces:** our residents have access to the right employment spaces in the right locations with strong networks which encourages enterprise and facilitates sustained growth
3. **Thriving and Investing:** our borough is exciting, attractive and a welcoming place where businesses thrive, people aspire to live and visit, and new enterprises seek to invest
4. **High Streets for the Future:** our high streets can adapt to the change need of consumer, continue to have strong offer, that includes places to live, work and entertain
5. **Connectivity and Mobility:** our community is well connected through diverse physical and digital infrastructure networks which underpins mobility across the whole borough
6. **Tourism and Culture:** our cultural and tourism industries continue to grow and diversify, and our unique historical features are promoted
7. **Green Economy:** we want to be promoting a green economy to help deliver sustainability and growth

3.74 The strategy is vital to the longer term planning and recovery of the local economy, ensuring that businesses continue to recognise Bromley as a centre of excellence for business location. The Council have engaged with key stakeholders on the draft strategy and it is due to be presented at PDS and Executive for adoption in June.