

From: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services
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To: Scrutiny Committee - 7 July 2020

Subject: The work of the KRF and of KCC in responding to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

Electoral Division: All

Summary:

This paper provides an overview of the Kent Resilience Forum response and KCC emergency planning response to Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic referencing key operational activity and timelines.

Recommendation(s):

Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the content of this report.

1. Background to the Kent Resilience Forum

- 1.1 The Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) is a partnership of organisations and agencies who work together to ensure a coordinated response and improved resilience to emergencies that could have a significant impact on communities.
- 1.2 The KRF is one of 42 local resilience forums (LRFs) across England set up in response to the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) 2004. The CCA established the legislative framework for civil protection in the event of emergencies in the UK.
- 1.3 LRFs are aligned with local police areas, with member agencies working together to ensure that, if, and when an emergency occurs, they are prepared to respond to it together and minimise any impact.
- 1.4 LRFs are not legal entities in their own right, but are a partnership of member agencies, including those defined under the CCA by responder 'categories':
 - Category 1 responders are organisations that are directly involved in the response to an emergency. This includes emergency services in Kent (Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, South East Coast Ambulance Service, Maritime and Coastguard Agency), local authorities, primary care aspects of the NHS, and others.
 - Category 2 responders are those who have a role to play in response but may be less directly involved. This includes organisations such as utility companies, infrastructure (e.g. Network Rail), and others.

- 1.5 The KRF also includes members who are not categorised under the Act but have a potentially significant role in responding to emergencies, notably the military and the voluntary sector.
- 1.6 All partners are vitally important to the KRF's objectives in protecting the people of Kent. Kent County Council, alongside Kent Police and Kent Fire and Rescue Service, plays a leading role in the KRF.
- 1.7 In preparation for the need to respond to any emergency, the KRF has in place agreed response frameworks and emergency plans. Training and exercising take place regularly to ensure that knowledge and experience are as up to date as possible and shared with partner organisations but also, critically, that strong relationships between partners are built and maintained.

2. Background to KCC's emergency planning role and responsibilities

- 2.1 KCC is a 'Category 1 Responder' as described above. This means KCC is legally bound to ensure that we have the capacity to respond to threats to life, property and the environment. The Act defines an emergency as:
 - (a) an event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare;
 - (b) an event or situation which threatens serious damage to the environment;
 - (c) war, or terrorism, which threatens serious damage to security.
- 2.2 As a 'Category 1 Responder' and upper tier Local Authority, KCC is subject to seven duties addressing risk assessments, planning, undertaking and promoting business continuity, warning and informing, co-operation and information sharing.
- 2.3 Governance across these duties is delivered at KCC through four Directorate Resilience Groups, each reporting to a single corporate Cross Directorate Resilience Forum. Resilience issues are also regularly reported to Directorate and Corporate Management Teams, with policy initiatives and Key Decisions tabled at the appropriate Cabinet Committee and Executive level.
- 2.4 The County Council currently maintains 16 emergency plans, including a strategic [Major Emergency Plan](#), and 172 individual service Business Continuity Plans, which inform a [Corporate Business Continuity Plan](#).
- 2.5 KCC also operates a County Emergency Centre at Invicta House, Maidstone which can be mobilised around the clock. A weekly 24/7 command rota details on-call Duty Emergency Planning Officers (DEPOs), Duty and Recovery Directors, Tactical Managers and Emergency Response Team cover.
- 2.6 The KCC Resilience and Emergency Planning Service ensures legal and regulatory compliance, maintains emergency and business continuity plans,

supports relevant governance, provides technical advice and support, and a 24/7 emergency response capability. The service is based within the County Emergency Centre and currently comprises 3.6 FTE posts, with one further temporary project officer role and one 0.4 FTE seconded into the team to assist the Coronavirus (COVID-19) response.

3 KRF's Coronavirus (COVID-19) response

- 3.1 The first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Kent on 2nd March. Using the already established response frameworks, a command and control structure was stood up consisting of the following cells for this particular emergency:
- Strategic Coordinating Group – Jointly chaired, on a weekly rotating basis, by KCC (Barbara Cooper), Kent Police (T/ACC Claire Nix) and Kent Fire and Rescue Service (Ann Millington).
 - Tactical Coordinating Group – Chaired by Kent Police
 - Health and Social Care Cell – Jointly chaired by the Directors of Public Health for KCC and Medway Council
 - Media and Communications Cell – Chaired by KCC
 - Multi Agency Information Cell (MAIC) – Chaired by Kent Fire and Rescue Service
 - Programme and Resources Cell – Chaired by KCC
 - Vulnerable People and Communities Cell – Chaired by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
 - Supply Chain and Logistics Cell – Chaired by Kent Fire and Rescue Service
 - Death Management Process Group – Chaired by KCC
- 3.2 Partners from across the KRF network provided the staffing for these cells, with KCC providing appropriately skilled staffing into every cell. A number of those staff have now wholly or in part returned to their substantive roles.
- 3.3 Initially the coordinating groups met weekly but, after two weeks, this increased to daily meetings. The response frameworks were written on the basis of the ability to hold physical meetings to manage and control an emergency but, because of the nature of this emergency, partners learned and adapted quickly to undertaking this work by remote means.
- 3.4 Partners and central government require frequently updated information. A common operating picture (COP) was developed and prepared on a daily basis, which was shared across partners and with central government using the secure Resilience Direct website.
- 3.5 The MAIC is a new addition to the command and control structure introduced as a result of learning from previous emergency responses and exercises. It has performed a vital role in providing control over the flow and collation of information to support the cells, the remote coordination activities and in

producing the COP. The effectiveness and impact of the MAIC has been recognised by all partners, including Government, as being excellent.

- 3.6 Each cell quickly produced their terms of reference setting out the key priorities for their work. Examples of these, and some of the major achievements so far are:

Vulnerable People and Communities

Key Priorities

- Support the delivery of food and essential household items to vulnerable residents (including the shielded cohort) and those who are self-isolated.
- Manage the logistics of delivering support to communities, the shielded cohort, and vulnerable people.
- Provide a conduit for partners and interested parties (e.g. community groups, voluntary sector) to raise wider community impacts and assess those for threat, risk or harm and respond accordingly.
- Work with KCC Trading Standards to mitigate the impact of fraud associated with Covid-19.

Major Achievements so far

- Community support hubs set up in each district/borough (led by the district/borough councils)
- Vulnerable people identified, contacted and support provided where needed.
- Identified problems with government food supplies to those shielding, liaised with MHCLG and resolved.
- Broader issues of vulnerability, including mental health and financial vulnerability, identified. Wider partnership engaged to provide support and/or signposting.

Death Management Process Group

Key Priorities

- Ensure that the death management process can cope with the increase in deaths, providing logistical oversight and management.
- Identify best practice solutions from local arrangements and share with all those affected by these decisions as responses evolve.
- Pool resources and provide regional support, where possible and beneficial
- Consider cemetery and crematoria capacities
- Consider current storage arrangements and the requirement for regional facilities

Major Achievements so far

- Established the Aylesford Temporary Place of Rest, ready for the first spike in April. Currently reviewing this facility ahead of a potential second or even third wave

- Produced fortnightly modelling as to the forecast impact on the death pathway between now and spring 2021
- Produced a Kent and Medway Funeral Standards Guidance
- Established a Clinicians' Hub of Doctors and an Administrative Hub of Volunteers to coordinate with PMART (Pandemic Multi Agency Response Team) made up by police and ambulance teams, to ensure all community deaths from COVID-19 are handled swiftly but sensitively
- Established an emergency route for PPE for Funeral Directors should there be a second spike and national commercial supplies become unavailable
Health and Social Care Cell

Key objectives

- Identify any support required to deliver the health and social care services required to keep the public safe and meet statutory duties during the response to Covid-19
- Provide consistent guidance, messaging and Public Health advice on Covid-19 to the health and social care sector
- Provide a common interface between Health and Social Care and their multi-agency partners
- Develop messaging that should go to the public in Kent via the Media and Communications Cell

Major achievements so far

- Developed two sub-cells for care home support and for testing
- Established regional testing centre at Ebbsfleet
- Coordinated deployment of temporary testing units to various locations in Kent and Medway
- Prepared and implemented social care action plan
Supply Chain and Logistics Cell

Key Objectives

- Understand the threat and risk to the PPE consumable supply chain
- Respond to requests for PPE supply support from partner agencies/Districts/Boroughs in non-clinical settings
- Access the national level procurement streams directly
- Work with suppliers to enable them to be effective and explore central hubs within the county for the storage and distribution of key/high volume consumables

Major achievements so far

- Over four million items of PPE distributed to partners
- Mutual aid provided to wider partnership

- Identified and coordinated a variety of procurement opportunities for partners for a wide range of PPE including masks, gloves, disposable aprons, clinical waste sacks and face shields
- Opened two stores/distribution centres for PPE (in Rochester and Canterbury)
- KCC contact centre engaged to manage calls from non-clinical settings requiring PPE

4. KCC's Coronavirus (COVID-19) response

- 4.1 The County Council is responsible through the National Health Service Act 2006 and Health and Social Care Act 2012 for providing information and advice on appropriate local health protection arrangements. This responsibility rests with the Director of Public Health and encompasses both planning for and responding to emergencies that present a threat to public health. This responsibility placed and continues to place KCC at the centre of the local response to Coronavirus (COVID-19).
- 4.2 The following paragraphs describe the key interventions undertaken by KCC to support the response to the current pandemic.
- 4.2.1 **KCC Governance:** Three planning meetings, held on 28th, 31st January and 7th February 2020, were initiated to support resilience and infection control interventions for schools and social care and discuss emerging human resources implications. Existing resilience structures operated until 5th March when KCC initiated the first Kent Coronavirus (COVID-19) Resilience Forum Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) meeting, chaired by the Director of Public Health. The Emergency Planning Service developed the draft KRF Gold Strategy for the outbreak, which was subsequently agreed on 12th March. At Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG) level the KCC duty tactical manager and an emergency planning officer have represented the County Council on the initially daily (and now twice weekly) KRF TCG meetings throughout.
- 4.2.2 **KCC Situation Reporting:** In late February it was determined that existing generic resilience governance structures would be supplemented to support the response to the outbreak. On 6th March KCC established its weekly Coronavirus (COVID-19) Business Continuity Task Group, chaired by the Director of Public Health.
- 4.2.3 The work of this group was informed by daily situation reports from KCC services which captured staff availability including COVID illness, and self-isolating reports; matters creating operational impact for KCC to be aware of and action appropriately; matters creating operational impact requiring wider sighting and potential action via KRF; and matters anticipated to impact

services within the next three days and within the next fortnight. This dynamic intelligence gathering enabled early identification and resolution of emerging issues. Reporting was undertaken each weekday until early June, when it moved to a weekly format.

- 4.2.4 This Situation Report output informed daily (initially six days a week) Corporate Management Team meetings, which became twice weekly at the beginning of May. The daily Situation Reports also informed each of the four Directorates' Resilience Groups as well as the efforts of the KCC Emergency Planning Service across the entire March to present day period. The Situation Reports influenced both corporate and KRF planning and response activity. The County Council's Emergency Centre initially undertook 12 hour weekday operation (with appropriate out of hours cover) to support situation reporting and operational response - this has notably included sourcing and distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE). Operation of the Centre is now more flexible and is predicated upon operational requirements.
- 4.2.5 **KCC Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** It was identified at the outset that PPE supply chains would come under pressure from increased worldwide demand exacerbated by the additional requirement generated by enhanced infection control measures across KCC and care providers.
- 4.2.6 It was decided early on to utilise existing procurement structures, predicated upon Kent Commercial Services (KCS) supported by a simplified online PPE purchasing portal. Daily corporate procurement meetings were also initiated by the Emergency Planning team and chaired by the KCC Strategic Commissioner to support this important area of activity.
- 4.2.7 The Emergency Planning Service further led on securing donations of PPE from academic and research institutions, businesses and individuals (including KCC staff and their families and friends). Some 107,625 items of equipment have been sourced and quality assured to-date and this generous gifting of mutual aid has been fundamental in ensuring that appropriate PPE is available to support KCC staff and care providers, especially when supply chains were at their most pressurised in late March and April.
- 4.2.8 An inventory of donated equipment is maintained, ensuring PPE is allocated and distributed quickly to wherever it is needed most. Pre-emptive and reactive 24/7 PPE support for local care homes and care charities has been central to the KCC response to the pandemic. Infrastructure, Facilities Management, Emergency Planning and out of hours volunteer drivers all supported this distribution effort.
- 4.2.9 A **KCC Public Informing** dedicated landing page was created on kent.gov.uk which continues to this day, and is updated dynamically. Its content has

changed over the weeks to reflect the content most relevant or most sought by residents and businesses, and currently includes FAQs, NHS Test and Trace, Kent Together, Service Updates, Support for Care Homes, Support for Business, and Government Advice.

- 4.3 A dedicated online page was also created (www.kentpublicprotection.info/covid19alerts) to warn and advise about fraudsters and the vast number of Covid-19 related scams targeting Kent residents and businesses. These channels have helped support residents by providing significant promotion for the Kent Together helpline, as well as providing advice on the frontline role of Public Protection services including Emergency Planning, Community Wardens and Trading Standards.
- 4.3.1 On behalf of the Kent Resilience Forum, and in response to the ask of Government, KCC established the Kent Together helpline (accessed both online and by telephone) for coordinating support for the most vulnerable in our communities, including those in the Government's shielded definition. This launched on 1st April, and signposts requests for help via each of the districts' own COVID-19 community hubs. Since its launch it has made 4,591 referrals representing 6,344 requests for help. The category of help being requested most is food (58%) followed by help collecting prescriptions (26%), and this has been the case throughout the entire pandemic to date. Members of the public have contacted Kent Together 53% by phone, 47% online across the period.
- 4.3.2 As the pandemic has evolved KCC's Public Protection Group of services developed a social and digital media plan to help protect Kent residents and businesses. Between 17th March and 8th June these alerts and messages had a direct reach of 1,864,000, with a further 1,163,000 achieved through viral reach.
- 4.3.3 **KCC Staff Communications and Engagement** has been led via very well-received regular communications from the Corporate Management Team as well as KNet FAQs which were updated daily March into May, and are now updated dynamically as and when the national situation changes. The FAQs are also updated in response to staff queries raised to the Engagement team directly, via the aforementioned Situation Reports, and via the four KCC Directorate Resilience Groups.
- 4.3.4 The KNet content for staff has additionally changed over the weeks but typically included Government Updates, Comfort and Safety, Remote Working tips and hints, PPE and Testing Advice, and an extensive Keeping Well programme that includes bite-sized wellbeing seminars. Staff feedback has been very positive about the internal staff engagement, as borne out by the recent staff survey.
- 4.3.5 **KCC Planning:** A bespoke KCC Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic Contingency Plan, setting out key principles and response structures, was drafted by the Emergency Planning Service and published in electronic format

on 1st April and has been updated dynamically as the pandemic has evolved, with the document currently in its eighth iteration. The unique characteristics of the coronavirus pandemic are reflected within the KCC contingency plan.

- 4.3.6 **Test and Trace:** To support the introduction of test and trace, outbreak control plans are being developed by the Director of Public Health, and a system for dealing with queries in and out of hours has been developed and assimilated into the weekly KCC Command Rota. More detail on this will be provided in the 23rd July Scrutiny paper on how the KRF and KCC continue to respond to the pandemic, and are preparing for any second wave.

5. KCC's Financial Implications

- 5.1 The cost to KCC of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has been captured as part of the monitoring process and is in the region of £130m, including £20m of lost income in the first quarter of 20/21. To date, £66.9m of Government grants have been secured for the authority's services.

6. KCC's Legal Requirements

- 6.1 The Emergency Planning Service has ensured continued resilience to other risks and maintained legal and regulatory compliance in areas such as offsite nuclear planning and major accident hazard pipelines by allocating 1.5 FTE staff primarily to non COVID-19 work.

7. KCC's Equalities Impact

- 7.1 Equalities Impact Assessments (EqIAs) are undertaken for emergency plans and to address the implications of a range of emergency scenarios upon vulnerable individuals and communities. The County Council's Resilience and Emergency Planning Service and Social Care teams co-operate closely with the NHS, voluntary sector and other partners to enable dynamic identification of and support for individuals and communities potentially at risk in the event of emergencies.
- 7.2 An EqIA for the COVID-19 Contingency Plan was drafted and continues to be updated as the Plan continues to evolve in response to the pandemic's evolution in the county.

8. GDPR Considerations

- 8.1 The County Council's response to the pandemic has not required the processing of personal data by the Resilience and Emergency Planning Service. Where individual services may have handled personal data, they will have undertaken the necessary Data Protection Impact Analysis screening

9. Conclusions regarding how KCC has responded to the pandemic in conjunction with the KRF

- 9.1 A number of years of preparation for Brexit stood both the KRF and KCC well for responding to the first few months of COVID-19, in that cross-organisational relationships were well-established and active, business continuity plans were tested and in place, KCC and partners were technologically prepared for shifting to home working where appropriate, and extensive emergency plan exercising had been undertaken with quite literally thousands of KCC staff and KRF membership staff.
- 9.2 Work is now underway to learn the lessons from the response so far. A KRF project has been started with the Universities of Kent and Loughborough to identify the lessons. The project is in two stages, stage one intending to implement learning quickly in preparation for possible future waves of disease and stage two being intended to implement learning on a longer term, structural basis. KRF members are also participating in national work to learn lessons and individual KRF members will also be conducting their own debriefing. This includes KCC which is currently assimilating lessons learned from local experience to-date of responding to Coronavirus (COVID-19).
- 9.3 The County Council and the KRF identified early on and moved quickly to ensure effective planning and response to the challenges posed by Coronavirus (COVID-19). Effective situation reporting, clear communication and governance channels, combined with effective procurement and distribution of vital PPE to support staff and providers, all went some way to mitigating the harm inflicted locally by Coronavirus (COVID-19). Indeed, there is emerging data to indicate that, despite having more care homes than other South East counties (and other UK regions), Kent has so far seen the lowest outbreak rate in the South East. Feedback from care providers has recognised the quality of support received from KCC and via the KRF Supply Chain and Logistics Cell. To ensure continued resilience, a buffer stock of KCS and donated PPE is maintained to enable timely infection control interventions in the event of any second wave.
- 9.4 Winter brings increased risk from severe weather, seasonal flu and potentially a second wave of coronavirus (COVID-19) at a time when hospitals are already under pressure. Further, 31st December will see transition from existing EU trade agreements, with all the potential implications this change will bring for trade travelling into and out of county. It is therefore vital that the KRF and KCC remain vigilant and prepared. This will be further covered in the Scrutiny paper of 23rd July.

<p>10. Recommendation: Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the content of this report.</p>

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