

# Cabinet

## 28 October 2021

Strategic & Corporate Services –  
Strategy, Policy, Relationships and  
Corporate Assurance



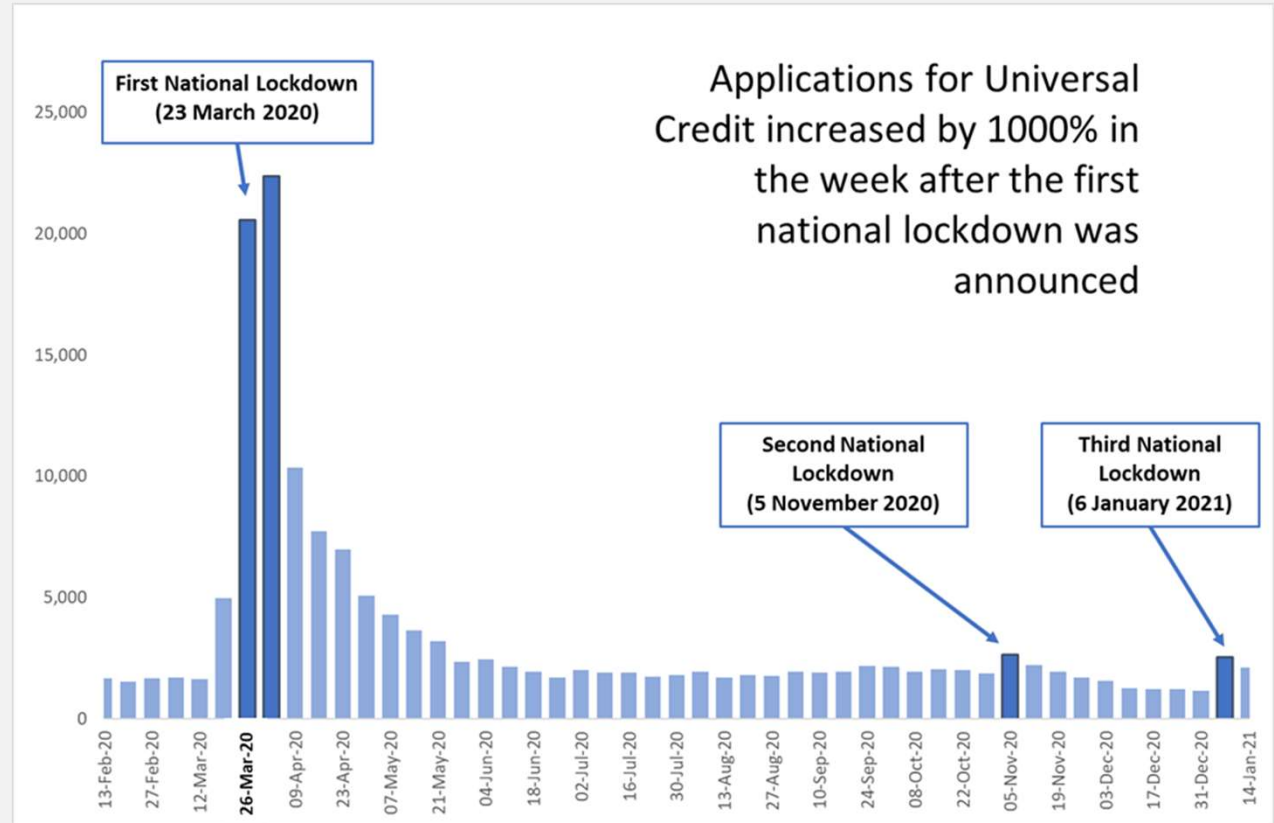
# Impact of COVID-19



At the peak, more than 132,000 households in Kent relied on Universal Credit.



Claimant rates are still double pre-pandemic levels.



# Kent Together



- Kent Together is a helpline, **available 24/7 online or by phone**, that provides a single, convenient point of contact for Kent residents in urgent need of help during the pandemic.
- Launched on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020, Kent Together has received over **6,300** referrals to date.

**Kent Together HELPLINE**  
**kent.gov.uk/kenttogether 03000 41 92 92**



- **In partnership with the local district hubs**, support offered at launch included food deliveries, collecting prescriptions, dog walking or a friendly chat for anyone feeling lonely.
- As the pandemic evolved the helpline provided additional areas of support including **financial and mental health and wellbeing advice**.
- Kent Together has been **promoted across Kent** through organic channels as well as print, radio, social media and a targeted leaflet drop.

Kent Together has received **6,300 referrals** for over **8,600 requests for support**.

Requests received by type from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to 10 October 2021:

Support Requested	Total Requests	% of Total Requests
Basic tasks	600	7%
Energy	192	2%
Food	5,265	61%
Loneliness	531	6%
Prescriptions	1,859	22%
Something else	161	2%



# Winter Grant Fund and Local Support Grant

## Winter Grant Fund

- Support for Families with Children - £4.9m
- Support for Families without children and individuals - £0.79m

**Estimated Number of people helped through Winter Grant Fund – 178,181 in Kent**

People helped through partnership work with utility companies – 3,720

## Local Covid Support Grant

- Support for Families with Children - £5.8m
- Support for Families without children and individuals - £0.26m

**Estimated Number of people helped through Local Covid Support Grant – 103,461**

## Free School Meals

- Through all grant funding received, approximately £2.9m has been spent on Free School Meals

# Current Climate

There are some key factors impacting financial hardship this Autumn:

- A higher **energy price cap** came into force from 1 October, with about 15 million households facing a 12% rise in energy bills
- The **Universal Credit uplift** (£20 per week) implemented during COVID-19 ended 6 October 2021
- **Furlough Schemes** came to an end 30 September 2021
- General increase in cost of living e.g food, fuel



# Helping Hands & Financial Hardship

**Residential**  
£4m

**Data**  
£0.4m (COMF)

**Digital**  
£5m  
(£2.5m + £2.5m COMF)



**Business**  
£3m  
Economic  
Development

**Crowd  
Funding**  
£0.5m

**Referrals**  
£28k (COMF)

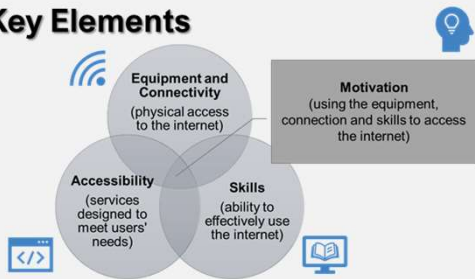


- Provided an additional **£50 reduction** for working age households already in receipt of discounts under Local Council Tax Reduction Schemes (in total £3.6m)
- **£2.4m** provided to increase local hardship funds to enable districts to help other households facing financial difficulty and struggling to pay council tax bills

# Helping Hands: Digital Inclusion & Capability



## Key Elements



## Key Barriers



## Key Principles



## Key Projects/Schemes



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# Helping Hands: Residential Schemes

## Fuel Poverty

- Crisis Support Payments
  - Debt Advice
  - Training
- One-off item support

## Water Poverty

Work with providers to identify people in water poverty and provide support and access to services.

## Debt Advice

Linking residents to Debt Advice agencies to help provide support on managing debt.

## Underwritten Loan Scheme

Working with Citizens Advice Bureau and Kent Savers to provide underwritten loans to residents in high interest debt.

# Helping Hands: Referrals

- When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many individuals were furloughed, lost their job or had to stay at home resulting in an increase in pressure on finances.
- Many organisations were sign-posting individuals to support – however, this is entirely reliant on the individual making onward contact.
- The referral workstream aims to strengthen referrals across Kent.

## Referrals Outputs



### Refernet

A robust online system that is safe and secure to send referrals through, replacing the need to sign-post.

### STP Website

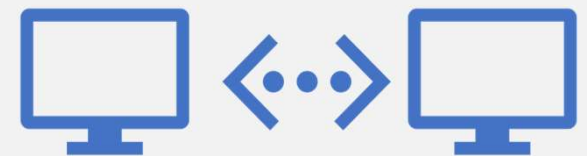
An online county-wide repository of information.

### MAN

The Money Advice Network service will link in with Refernet to offer financial support through advisors at no cost.

# Helping Hands: Data Sharing

- At both County and District level, support services often struggle to identify those at most risk before they enter into crisis.
- There is a need to understand individual financial circumstances and debt in a more complete way, as well as what social risks they may be vulnerable to because of this.
- Combining data from organisations enables Local Authorities to better refer and sign-post people, engage with residents in a more sensitive way, and intervene with targeted supported before people reach crisis.



# Support to Residents and Businesses via COMF



## Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) Context

Prevent or contain the spread of COVID-19 and/or support those disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Total Funding £48.1m

Example initiatives that have been funded under the Contain Outbreak Management that have supported residents and businesses in Kent

### Support for Residents

- 1,659 assistive technology devices distributed to enable vulnerable individuals to enable them to continue to connect with the world.
- £2.5m of funding to support residents with rent arrears that are in private rented accommodation and are at risk of eviction
  - 82,000 learning opportunities delivered through the Reconnect Programme
- Funding to districts to enable funding to be directed to foodbanks and to house their homeless communities.

### Support for Businesses

- Free COVID-19 Safe Training for Kent Businesses - 60 organisations trained. Opportunity for a further 975 organisations between now and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.
- 100 grants of up to £5k to the Creative, Cultural and Voluntary sector to adapt business models to support safe/alternative delivery.
- Funding to VisitKent to support the promotion and uptake of the 'We're Good to Go' mark
- Funding to Districts to support local efforts such as increased wardens to support businesses in enforcing COVID-19 legislation

# Next Steps

- We will use the Helping Hands scheme and Contain Outbreak Management Fund to continue supporting residents experiencing financial hardship and those disproportionately affected by Covid-19
- Subject to the formal key decision, we will maximise the use of the Household Support Fund to continue funding free school meals for eligible children in the school holidays, through to Easter and to help residents over the coming winter
- We will continue to work to deliver effective support to residents in financial hardship and build a sustainable legacy of community resilience