

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 16 August 2021

Report Title

Proposals for use of the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) to aid the Council's on-going response to Covid-19 and to support recovery in the borough from the impacts of the pandemic

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

Yes

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

Rotherham has been eligible for payments from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) to support proactive containment and intervention measures since October 2020.

To date £5.177m had been spent against the COMF in 2020/21 with £3.469m of unspent 2020/21 COMF funding carried forward for use in 2021/22. Of this, £2.241m is committed and £1.228m remains uncommitted. An additional £2.129m of COMF funding has been allocated for 2021/22 meaning the total uncommitted COMF for 2021/22 is £3.357m. The money is to continue to help reduce the spread of coronavirus (Covid-19) and support public health activities with the latter being left to the judgement of Local Authorities in conjunction with their Director of Public Health.

Commitments already made ensure that Rotherham's Covid-19 Response functions are in place until March 2022, by which time it is expected that the workload and capacity required will reduce unless there is another significant Variant of Concern.

The paper set out the proposals for the remaining unallocated spend and the reasons for the proposals.

Recommendations

1. That the Cabinet consider the proposals for use of the COMF and agree in principal the areas of proposed investment and allocations.
2. That Cabinet gives delegated authority to the Director of Public Health with agreement from the Section 151 Officer to commit the unallocated COMF funding, and any underspend from approved allocations, in line with grant conditions.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 - Equality Screening Assessment

Appendix 2 - Equality Analysis

Appendix 3 - Carbon Impact Assessment

Background Papers

None

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

None

Council Approval Required

Yes

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Proposals for use of the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) to aid the Council's on-going response to Covid-19 and to support recovery in the borough from the impacts of the pandemic

1. Background

- 1.1 The Council released its Outbreak Control Plan in June 2020 (which has now been superseded by a replacement, the Local Outbreak Management Plan), which set out the overall approach to containing the Covid-19 pandemic. Following the move to Local Covid-19 Alert Levels, as of 12 October 2020, local authorities were eligible for payments from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) to support proactive containment and intervention measures. Though local alert levels were removed by Government and replaced with the national roadmap published on 22nd February, the COMF has been retained as the payment mechanism to support local authorities with Covid-19 related activity.
- 1.2 £5.177m of spend has been incurred in 2020/21 against the COMF. £3.469m of the 2020/21 allocation is available in 2021/22, of which £2.241m (based on the July forecast) is committed to fund the Test and Trace team (this includes staff for the Community Hub, Communications, Public Health Specialists and Compliance) through to March 2022. This leaves £1.228m of the 2020/21 COMF funding which is uncommitted.
- 1.3 The COMF 2021/22 funding has been confirmed at £2.129m for the Council bringing the total uncommitted COMF available for use in 2021/22 to £3.357m. Further funding and reporting requirements in 2021/22 are still to be confirmed by DHSC
- 1.4 The COMF remains ring-fenced for public health purposes, with the 2021/22 COMF Guidance stating that it is *"to continue to help reduce the spread of coronavirus and support public health activities"*. The specific public health activities that can be funded are *"left to the judgement of Local Authorities in conjunction with their Directors of Public Health"*. *"Provision of this further funding is contingent on Local Authorities having completed and returned all monitoring forms for the COMF for the Financial Year 2020/21. Monthly monitoring forms will be required during the Financial Year 2021/22."*
- 1.5 With commitments already in place to support the focus on reducing the spread of the virus in Rotherham through the Test and Trace team (up to 31st March 2022), this paper sets out the wider public health impacts of the pandemic in Rotherham, proposals for activities to mitigate these impacts and enhance the borough's recovery through the remainder of 2021/22. The funding will assist with the required community led recovery, address emerging needs and enable the enhancement and acceleration of core work programmes in response to the pandemic and its impacts.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The pandemic has had a significant impact upon Rotherham. Up to 21st June 2021 Rotherham had seen 22,030 positive Covid-19 cases recorded with 836 deaths occurring where Covid-19 was recorded on the death certificate (754 residents' deaths recorded within 28 days of a positive test). The Rotherham Foundation NHS Trust has treated 2592 patients with 579 Covid-19 deaths occurring to Rotherham residents in the hospital.

- 2.2 Whilst significant, it is not just the cases and deaths that have had an impact on Rotherham. During the height of the pandemic 18,128 residents (7% of the population) were identified as being Clinically Extremely Vulnerable and advised to shield. This population cohort had specific vulnerabilities that gave them a raised risk of poor outcomes should they contract Covid-19 and was predominantly made up of elderly residents. This group alongside Care Home residents endured significant restrictions in their social contact and movements through much of the pandemic which itself impacted their mobility, conditioning and confidence. For those with dementia reduced stimulation may also have led to accelerated decline in memory and cognitive function.
- 2.3 It is not just the elderly and vulnerable who have been affected during the pandemic. For every case there have been contacts who have been required to isolate with resultant impacts on their dependents, carers, employers and schools. For the families and friends of those hospitalised and those who have died during the pandemic Covid-19 has further impacted their experience by limiting the contact they could have during any illness and the ability to grieve.
- 2.4 For those residents not directly or indirectly affected by Covid-19 infection, all have been affected in some way by the necessary measures put in place to control transmission. During the lockdowns and Tiering restrictions that were imposed, many people have found themselves isolated and with reduced contact with friends, family and services.
- 2.5 The closing of certain sectors of the economy has meant furlough for a significant number of residents, unemployment or loss of livelihood, all bringing with them reduced incomes and impacts on family budgets. For many those impacts will not yet be felt in full, with protections through furlough and until recently, the stay on evictions meaning the full impacts are still to come both for individuals and the wider economy.
- 2.6 There has also been a significant impact on children and young people with the closure of schools during the lockdowns. The first lockdown covered 60 school days during which schools were only open for key worker and vulnerable children. Whilst many schools worked hard to adapt delivery it took time to put in place alternative teaching and to develop a remote learning offer. The second lockdown saw a further 35 days of face to face schooling lost, this time with a fuller remote learning option for those not attending as key worker or vulnerable children. Disruption to learning also occurred while schools were open with 83 Incident Management Teams being held for school outbreaks in Rotherham since September 2020. During the pandemic period over 24,000 instances of a pupil being required to isolate for 10 days occurred with some pupils being required to isolate multiple times. We know that the impact of school closures and isolation has exacerbated existing inequalities with children from poorer backgrounds being impacted more. Children in transition and exam years also saw a disproportionate impact.
- 2.7 For children and young people, the pandemic has not just had an academic impact. They have also missed out on social and emotional development during periods of isolation and through restrictions on their usual activities. Children have missed out on the stimulation and development provided by play groups, children's centres, sports and youth clubs and school based extra-curricular activities as well as missing out on the usual cultural and leisure activities available outside of the pandemic.

- 2.8 The economic impacts of the pandemic have not just affected individuals but have affected whole sectors of the economy. The hospitality industry and night-time economy have been particularly hard hit along with leisure and tourism, the arts and the voluntary sector. Despite furlough and business support grants some businesses and organisations will not re-open. Others will remain sustainable in the long-term but may have had to take on debts which will impact profitability for years to come.
- 2.9 Under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme there were 43,900 cumulative employees on furlough in Rotherham as of May 2021.
- 2.10 The Rotherham Community Hub was established to provide support to residents who had in any way been impacted by the pandemic. Since March 2020, 444 residents have requested support with financial hardship caused by the Covid outbreak. Although this is only around 7% of the total support requests received, it should be noted that a further 1,574 households have requested Emergency Food Parcels which may indicate underlying financial issues
- 2.11 During May 2021, Citizens Advice Rotherham dealt with the following enquiries:
- 150 Benefits Advice cases – the majority being new Universal Credit (UC) claims, along with appeals and supporting clients whose income has dropped as a consequence of Covid-19. The biggest challenge they are now facing is the potential impact of the loss of the £20 UC uplift and the difficulties that will cause on UC claimant's budgets.
 - 60 Debt Advice cases - this figure is for people supported to prevent evictions specifically and includes negotiating on rent and mortgage arrears repayments which, if successful, prevents eviction action
 - 25 Employment Law Advice cases - this includes clients that are being unfairly selected for redundancy, as well as people seeking advice on their rights around zero-hour contracts. Citizens Advice are now seeing an increase in cases where clients need help with furlough issues, particularly where the furlough period is being ended early or they are expected to return to work on changed employment terms and conditions.
- 2.12 Feedback from Citizens Advice Rotherham suggests that there will be a surge in workload for welfare rights and debt advice due to the pandemic and that:
- the biggest demand for support will be Welfare Rights, as people who have been furloughed subsequently find themselves out of work
 - the next biggest demand will be for Employment law advice as people are unfairly made redundant or dismissed from their jobs
 - and this will be linked to a demand for people seeking support to find work through assistance with job applications, developing CVs and looking for experience through volunteering if no suitable work is available.
 - the Citizens Advice debt team is at full capacity already and it is expected that there will be an influx of further people in debt, who were servicing their debts while on furlough.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 The Council built a Test and Trace function during 2020/21 under the direction of the Director of Public Health and sitting in the Adult Care, Housing and Public Health Directorate. This function, referred to as the Covid-19 Team, manage the response elements of the pandemic in accordance with the Local Outbreak Management Plan. This includes:

- Contact Tracing - under the Local Zero programme, the Council is responsible for contacting all people after a positive PCR test to offer support and ensure that they are self-isolating and have access to the available support.
- Incident Management Response – Public Health professionals overseeing responses to outbreaks in workplaces, schools, and social care settings. Providing direction, advice and guidance.
- Community Testing - responsible for the Councils Covid-19 testing programme for asymptomatic people and providing advice and assistance to businesses and individuals. Overseeing the Councils Community Collect offer for Lateral Flow test devices
- Covid-19-Enforcement – provides advice and guidance with enforcement of legislation pertaining to Covid-19 if required
- Community Engagement – officers work with the community, looking to promote the need to self-isolate after a positive PCR test. Encouraging testing/vaccination take up, providing Covid-19 advice and guidance across the borough
- Workplace Engagement – officers work with businesses to provide advice and guidance on Covid safe work practices and support operational delivery of outbreak responses in the sector.
- Communications, including the *Community Champions* grant work – responsible for the resident bulletins, updating the Council website/social media, campaigns to highlight miss-information and support positive activity such as *Let's Get Rotherham Moving*
- Data Analysts – officers explore multiple data sets to understand local prevalence rates, issues and take up of testing and vaccination opportunities. This informs the response to the pandemic through tactical decision making.

3.2 In line with decisions previously taken it is proposed to retain these functions throughout 2021/22 to maintain a continued Covid-19 Response function as the pandemic continues to develop. It is expected that as the pandemic and the national roadmap progress the requirements of the team will vary, and we will need to continue to be flexible in our approach and reactive to waves, outbreaks and changes to regulations. The Director of Public Health will continue to monitor the pandemic and to shape the overall response requirements throughout 2021/22. The cost of this function (over the full financial year) is anticipated to be £2.241m – all covered by the COMF through permitted carry forward into 2021/22. Officers in the function have temporary contracts of varying length from September 2021 up until 31st March 2022).

3.3 There may be opportunities to reassign some staff back to substantive or alternative roles during the financial year if the threat level of the pandemic reduces and it becomes an endemic response. This will primarily be in relation to enforcement and public health advisory staff. Should this occur and additional revenue funding become available, then further proposals will be brought to the Cabinet for consideration.

3.4 The remainder of this paper focuses on the options for expenditure of currently unallocated funding of £3.357m during 2021/22. It is expected that spending will be in line with the published national roadmap and be committed by 31st March 2022.

3.5 The options for expenditure of the remaining COMF allocation can broadly be categorised into three themes:

- Support for Children and Young People

- Support for Adults
- All Age Universal Support

3.6 Support for Children and Young People

3.6.1 Education:

Children and young people have endured a disrupted period of education during the pandemic and evidence outlines that a range of student cohorts have been disproportionately impacted by the challenges outlined by the pandemic. It is proposed to invest **£350,000** in education recovery across the borough to provide targeted support for the educational recovery of identified disadvantaged pupils, this includes focused education recovery activity for SEND students (£150,000) including those with Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) needs (2.1% increase in EHC Plans, 12.6% increase re. primary need SEMH) The trajectory of growth of students with SEMH needs across the borough and the wider impact of the pandemic on this cohort would support a focus in this area and would provide balance support to the challenges faced by our SEND students across the pandemic. From within this funding there will be opportunity to support additional focus on annual reviews to incorporate enhanced transition planning for students impacted by pandemic and additional support to schools to manage the challenges faced by schools/students in relation to SEMH needs driven by the pandemic and wider environmental factors.

3.6.2 The Council will provide targeted resource to enhance support to disadvantaged students (£50,000) and Elective Home Educated students (£50,000) and those with attendance issues as barrier to accessing education, with the additional resource used to enhance educational access for this cohort and it will provide additional fixed term capacity to support multi-agency approach to supporting access to education. This will support a focus on stabilising cohort numbers against the distinct rise in numbers and providing families with additional capacity to support challenges that are current barrier to education.

* (EHE rise from 201 students – September 2020 to 338 students 18th June 2021)

3.6.3 The Council will enhance the wider universal support for Education Recovery with system wide school improvement activity (£50,000), this will be governed by Rotherham Education Strategic Partnership (RESP) and we support universal enhancement of reading across all key stages of education which is a Ofsted Education Recovery priority. This will provide support to all schools to promote reading across all demographics and this will enhance Ofsted outcomes across schools as reading is fundamentally essential to Ofsted inspection framework.

3.6.4 All areas across education recovery will be underpinned by a general focus on holistic support for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, as well as encouraging positive progress with the curriculum and catch up activity provided by the Department For Education (DFE).

3.6.5 The Council proposes to realign £50,000 from other Children and Young People's Service allocation to enhance a further focus to support early years take up, which has been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, which will enable work to be focused in areas of significant deprivation in Rotherham. The aim would be to improve and grow current initiatives which are focused on supporting parent/carers accessing early years educational provision including BAME communities and central areas of Rotherham. We would aim to provide a targeted approach which reaches out to areas of the community where early years take up will have a significant impact on longer term educational outcomes.

3.6.6 **Parental/Carer SEND Advocacy:**

Due to the impact the pandemic has had on SEND children and young people it is proposed to invest **£60,000** in parental/carers support across Rotherham. This will build upon the work done by Parent Carers Forum across the pandemic. The proposal will enhance SEND outcomes outlined for vulnerable groups and provide a network of support for parents to overcome challenges that SEND students are evidencing. This includes growth in children with EHCs and those with SEMH needs

3.6.7 **Young Carers:**

Young People have also been affected by the pandemic in a variety of ways. Unpaid young carers have had to support children and adults with disabilities for prolonged periods during the pandemic because of services (both formal and informal) for the cared for person not being able to operate fully during lockdown. Care leavers have also not been able to access the same level of support from services and their support networks. This has created a degree of stress and creates the potential for future breakdown for this cohort, even with services reopening under the national roadmap, meaning that more people may end up in formal assessed services and / or with the ancillary costs. It is therefore proposed to invest **£90,000** to further support carers and care leavers through the established networks.

3.6.8 A recent survey by the Carers Trust shows how worries relating to Covid-19 and increased isolation caused by the lockdown have affected the mental health and wellbeing of the UK's young people with caring responsibilities.

3.6.9 Even before the outbreak of Covid-19, young carers and young adult carers were all too often spending significant amounts of time caring for a relative in addition to the time they needed to spend on education, work and time for themselves. The survey suggest coronavirus has significantly increased those pressures.

- 40% of young carers and 59% of young adult carers say their mental health is worse since Covid-19.
- 67% of young carers and 78% of young adult carers are more worried about the future since Covid-19.
- 66% of young carers and 74% of young adult carers are feeling more stressed since Covid-19.
- 69% of both young carers and young adult carers are feeling less connected to others since Covid-19.
- 11% of young carers and 19.7% of young adult carers report an increase of 30 hours or more in the amount of time they spend caring per week.
- 58% of young carers who are caring for longer since Covid-19 are spending on average ten hours a week more on their caring responsibilities. Among young adult carers the proportion is even higher at 63.6%.
- 7.74% of young carers and 14.94% of young adult carers who responded to the survey, said that they are now spending over 90 hours a week caring for a family member or friend.

3.6.10 Based on the survey findings and local data the Council proposes to develop:

3.6.11 **Engagement Programme for young carers:**

Barnardo's are currently experiencing increased referrals to the Young Carers service because of the easing of lockdown restrictions and the return to schools. Referrals in Quarter 1 are the highest for three years, as such the current waiting list

for the service is at capacity. Barnardo's have suggested an increase in staffing capacity by 16-20 hours to do some initial engagement work for young people who are currently on the waiting list. This would include some minimum intervention work, screening, identifying of quick wins in terms of support needs and linking in to group activity where appropriate. Recent referrals have seen an increase in complexity of cases due to additional Covid-19 pressures with increased caring responsibilities being recorded for some young people who are already accessing the service. This may mean that cases are more complex and are harder to close leading to the waiting list growing further. Existing staff have also been supporting young people on a more regular basis back into education following the lockdown period to ease young people's anxiety and maintain consistency of support.

The anticipated cost for this would be circa £50,000 (part of £90,000 referenced above in paragraph 3.6.7)

3.6.12 Additional subject specific group activity for young carers:

Barnardo's are currently looking to re-start their regular face to face group activity following a pause due to Covid-19 restrictions. To support this Barnardo's have suggested increased small group work to re-connect young people back into regular activity. The smaller group activity sessions will focus on areas connected to Covid-19 such as isolation and mental health along with understanding in greater depth how Covid-19 has impacted on young people's caring responsibilities. Recent referrals have suggested that young people have seen an increase in their caring role both in terms of the time taken to fulfil and also complexity of the support being provided. These activities could be delivered on a weekly basis and be used in conjunction or as a standalone to the above suggestion to engage young people who are currently on the waiting list.

The anticipated cost for this would be circa £40,000 (part of £90,000 referenced above in paragraph 3.6.7)

3.6.13 Desired Outcomes

- Greater prioritisation of mental health support for young carers.
- Improved support from education providers and employers to help young carers and young adult carers to juggle their caring roles alongside school, college, university or work.

3.6.14 The pandemic has limited options for proactive youth support and positive diversionary activity being able to operate safely and has heightened concerns about the mental health and wellbeing of young people. Bereavement, anxiety, lack of access to specialist provision, lost learning and reduced interaction with their peers and reduced social interaction. Additional one-off investment would predominantly focus on two areas:

3.6.15 The development of an offer for 11-25-year olds to support their mental health and wellbeing:

In 2018 Cabinet agreed a series of recommendations to transform the offer for young people, whilst making significant efficiency savings. One of the decisions was that the existing counselling offer would be disestablished and tested as a traded offer with local schools, to sustain the provision and bring in required funding to do so.

3.6.16 A traded offer was developed to improve the mental and emotional wellbeing of students in Rotherham schools and was launched with a deadline of March 2020 for expressions of interest to be submitted. Due to Covid-19 this deadline was extended. Despite the extension and subsequent conversations with schools, uptake was extremely low (two schools only). The Current provision of x2 FTE (45hrs) counselling for young people has now ended, leaving no counselling offer available to young people across the borough

3.6.17 **It is proposed that KOOTH (young people's on-line counselling service) is commissioned for 132 hours per month for 12 months.**

This would be a cost of **£117,000** (excluding VAT) *The population size of 11-25's is 44,620

3.6.18 **The creation of additional opportunities for young people who have lost out through Covid-19 to be supported through community and sporting organisations. This would place an emphasis on encouraging young people to participate in sport and healthy physical activity linking into wider public health programmes and recent issues such as water safety, child criminal exploitation and child sexual exploitation.**

The Council is looking to develop the universal offer for young people across the borough by working with the voluntary and community sector to create additional places to go and things to do. A commissioning route has been established to facilitate this and therefore an expansion, through one-off funding would be relatively straight forward to achieve. Service specification criteria relating to expectations and desired outcomes has already been developed.

It is proposed to invest **£133,000** on this activity.

3.6.19 **Desired outcomes include:**

- A reduction in mental health and wellbeing issues.
- An increase in positive activities, Places to go and things to do.
- A reduction in anti-social behaviour.
- Promoting the personal, educational, creative, and social development of young people.
- Tackling health inequalities with a focus on integrated partnership working
- Supporting vulnerable families or children and young people (using the Early Help Assessment) to meet the needs of young people and families at the earliest opportunity.
- Address new ways of working, including meeting Covid-19 secure standards in community settings, increase engagement in inclusive, universal provision that raises the aspirations and supports the development of young people between 10-25 years of age.
- Provide a range of activities that develop confidence and build their self-esteem, including trips and residential experiences.
- Reduce health inequalities, improve, and promote good physical and mental health.
- Ensure that young people are informed and supported to make safe and healthy choices and are referred to appropriate services when additional support is required.
- Ensuring young people feel safe in their communities and develop positive relationships.

- Promoting equality of access and taking positive action to ensure the most vulnerable of young people are not disadvantaged.
- Publish a programme of activities and demonstrate collaboration with sector providers.

3.6.20 **Ensure that children and young people will:**

- Have access to curriculum based personal, social, and emotional development opportunities.
- Be actively involved in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of the sessions.
- Take part in engaging and enriching and accredited activities.
- Be safe and not isolated.
- Identify their own learning opportunities.
- Have greater knowledge and awareness of their needs.
- Be offered accreditation and certificates of achievement to recognise young people's success and progression.

3.7 **Support for Adults**

3.7.1 **Isolation Support:**

The Council maintains a legal duty to provide contact tracing following confirmation that a person resident in the borough has tested positive with Covid-19 under the Local Zero programme. A crucial element of the approach is the ability to proactively offer immediate advice and support and where appropriate signpost the individual to financial support whilst they self-isolate for ten days in accordance with legal requirements. The government has confirmed continuation of the national and discretionary self-isolation schemes to September 2021.

3.7.2 The Council launched a local self-isolation support payment scheme to promote and encourage more isolation and to compensate those that do not meet the financial element of the government schemes on 25th January 2021. The Council initially allocated £100,000 from the COMF to fund 400 applications and awards £250 to successful applicants for isolation. The application process is based on similar criteria to the main government scheme with wider access:

- Have been told to stay at home and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace
- Are employed or self employed
- Are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result
- Have not been able to access the Government's self-isolation support payments or discretionary payments

3.7.3 To date, 239 successful applications have been processed to the value of £60,000. It is proposed to continue this scheme, with the application of the scheme predicated on the longevity of the government schemes as they will continue to run in tandem. Therefore, when the government scheme ends, the Council's Local Self-Isolation Support Scheme will also end. An additional **£10,000** investment is proposed to support further applicants until the end of the government scheme in September. Further contingency could be made if the Government scheme is extended further.

3.7.4 **Rotherham Community Hub:**

The national shielding support programme ceased on 1st April 2021 with much of the expected Council support coming from the Community Hub. The Hub was originally retained until the end of June - the original proposed date for Step 4 of the national roadmap but has continued to operate in line with Step 4 being implemented on 19th

July. A review of the Hub with stakeholders and users has been completed. It is proposed to repurpose the Community Hub to support early intervention and prevention with specific support for a wider cohort than just the former shielded population, potentially supporting any adult/family in the borough who requires assistance arising from the pandemic impacts, but does not meet statutory requirements for formal support. The Hub operates as a pre-front door to wider Council services and aims to find immediate solutions for people working with volunteers and VCS partners using effective sign-posting and informal advocacy to help navigate people to alternative support where needs cannot be met by the Hub.

3.7.5 It is proposed to continue to operate a Community Hub model until 31st December 2021 with an additional **£400,000** investment to cover staff and running costs. Separate to the COMF proposals a review of the Community Hub will be conducted and taken through scrutiny to consider its long term future and whether or not there is value in incorporating the model as part of the Council's wider pre-front door approach.

3.7.6 **Employment and Skills Support:**

The Council recognises the need to provide additional support to our residents whose employment situation has been affected by the pandemic. COMF funding could be utilised to deliver the following support:

- Investment in skills development, CV development and employability
- Benefits advice for those whose incomes have been affected to maximise income and mitigate impacts
- Debt advice and support to mitigate the risk of evictions and repossessions
- Employment law advice for people in the gig-economy, on zero hours contracts or who have adverse experience of the furlough scheme

3.7.7 The proposal will allow the Council to extend the scope of the excellent work already being undertaken within the Council's Pathways Team. The Council currently delivers advice and support to our unemployed and economically inactive residents through the match funded European Social Fund (ESF) Pathways Project. This project specialises in supporting people to upskill, access training and gain employment. Participants have a dedicated Employment Officer who assists them with CV writing and employability coaching. The service also offers access to:

- Behavioural change courses
- Certified training courses/licenses i.e. CSCS/HGV license
- Sector based skills academies i.e. Customer Service Skills
- Employment opportunities with a host of local employers including the Council

3.7.8 In addition to this, the project offers a wraparound support service to help remove the barriers to employment such as debt/childcare issues etc. The service has two specialist debt advisors and two support workers attached to the project that can provide full advice on debt management, benefit entitlement and income maximisation. The service can offer support to all residents, not just Council tenants, however at present the service can only work with people who are unemployed or economically inactive.

3.7.9 There is an ambition to expand the remit of the service to support people that we are currently unable to assist, due to ESF funding conditions/restrictions such as:

- People threatened with redundancy
- People on furlough

- People working reduced hours.
- People whose skill set is no longer in demand due to the pandemic
- People within the gig economy affected by Covid-19

3.7.10 The service is confident that it can efficiently mobilise an effective offer that can deliver support to a much wider cohort. The service already has the required skills, contacts, and procedures in place that would allow it to commence delivery within the existing team, whilst recruitment of additional capacity takes place, internally and externally. The recent recruitment process for an Employment Solutions Officer demonstrated that there are highly skilled individuals in the job market seeking these types of opportunities. The service would look to mirror the existing Pathways Project targets which would enable us to provide full employability and wrap around support to over 150 people, with a target of at least 60 participants entering accredited training or employment before March 2022.

This would include:

- Supporting people working reduced hours due to Covid-19 to find alternative/additional hours to increase their income.
- Support for people to upskill and training, including provision of a funding stream that will enable precariously employed people to pay for training such as HGV/CSCS.
- Support to claim benefits, manage finances and seek debt advice.
- Support with mental health, such as attending the Five Ways to Wellbeing programme.
- Support with CV writing, job applications and interview techniques.
- Support with sourcing volunteering opportunities.
- Support with job searching and employability skills.
- Support with tenancy sustainment and other housing related issues i.e. rent arrears with the offer of a dedicated Tenancy Support Officer
- Support with accessing education including basic maths and English
- Support with referrals to specialist services i.e. CLG, NHS, Domestic Abuse services etc.
- Support with confidence building, motivation, and personal development

3.7.11 To reach the target cohorts, the service would proactively raise awareness of the offer across a host of media platforms and with both internal and external referral partners. The service has established links with the CCG Social Prescribing Team and can use this relationship to reach the residents whose physical and mental health is being affected by their employment issues.

3.7.12 The service would seek to employ a specialist Employment Engagement Officer who will build relationships with local employers that have furloughed staff, so that support and assistance can be offered during this time.

3.7.13 As the service does not currently provide advice on employment rights and regulations, it is proposed that this is procured through the Rotherham Advice Partnership to increase capacity for delivery in this area. A caveat of the funding would be to ask that all clients receiving employment advice (where appropriate) are then automatically referred into the Council's employment team for further assistance.

- 3.7.14 The provision of accredited training courses and qualifications for people who are precariously employed and at present cannot access free training would be provided. A budget of £100,000 would allow a meaningful impact to be generated with increased economic prosperity for participants who can retrain and find alternative meaningful employment.
- 3.7.15 A further ambition is to expand support to all tenants and residents regarding financial management, budgeting, and income maximisation advice. The current service delivery model is focussed upon work with Council tenants. This service offer could be expanded to reach people with private tenancies and mortgages that may have never needed support before. The funding could facilitate a specialist money advice project 'Money Stretcher' that can deliver guidance on how to make your money go further when in receipt of a limited income. The project would include the creation of a guidebook which would include money saving techniques and useful contacts for support providers i.e. debt management. This could be available in both paper and digital format.
- 3.7.16 In addition to the above it is suggested that, considering the proposed removal of the £20 a week Universal Credit uplift in September, a greater resource is placed into the tenancy sustainment team. The project would deliver advice in partnership with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to target Universal Credit applicants affected by the £20 reduction. Group presentations on money saving techniques would be offered alongside bespoke money saving assessments with individuals.

The combined requirements for an enhanced service delivery are **£339,658**

3.7.17 Mental Health Support Worker Resource:

It is proposed to invest in additional Mental Health Support Worker resource in the established Community Mental Health Service provided by the Council in partnership with RDaSH. The basis for this investment is:

- Mental Health Support Workers have had a vital role during the pandemic, in ensuring people remain 'connected' to their circles of support and activities they need.
- This role contributes to the development of local community assets, helping to identify and develop solutions which will help individuals increase their networks and resilience.
- The role will assist with the growth in Mental Health needs, by supporting individuals to link back into the community and regain confidence.
- The role will assist with the prevention of loneliness.
- The role provides a direct link to other Council initiatives such as Thriving Neighbourhoods.
- The provision of an additional of three Support Workers until March 2022 would enable greater capacity for this important role. The investment required is **£62,000**. The staff deployment would be expedited by providing additional hours for part time staff across the service and would therefore be deliverable in the timescale needed.

3.7.18 Carers Support:

Unpaid carers have had to support children and adults with disabilities for prolonged periods during the pandemic because of services (both formal and informal) for the cared for person not being able to operate fully during lockdown. This has created a degree of carer stress and creates the potential for future breakdown, even with services reopening under the national roadmap, meaning that more people may end

up in formal assessed services with the ancillary costs and reduction in independence.

- 3.7.19 It is proposed to invest **£75,000** to further support adult carers through the established Active Solutions Partnership which includes key VCS partners and targets the needs of carers who are under stress for direct support, advice, and information. In addition, it is proposed to provide a one-off grant to Rotherham Crossroads to increase their development worker capacity by two posts **£60,000** to respond to the needs of carers in the community. This will help alleviate the impact caused by the temporary closure of some carers services such as Carers Corner leading to unmet need.

3.8 All Age Universal Support

3.8.1 Arts and Health Recovery Programme:

Culture is recognised as a key element of supporting recovery from the pandemic, giving the wider community positive activities to look forward to and involving them in participatory activity. The Sparks of Joy programme led by the Council's Culture and Leisure services and delivered by third party cultural organisations has put on a range of Covid-19 safe events during the pandemic.

For the remainder of 2021/22 the Culture and Leisure services would develop an Arts and Health programme to support mental and physical health as part of Covid-19 recovery including focus on:

- Summer events programme for children and young people involving participatory cultural and physical activity
- Bereavement focus – supporting those bereaved during the pandemic
- Post retirement focus – supporting those retiring before and during lock down to connect into the activities they would ordinarily have done, and to consider volunteering, linking into the Five Ways to Wellbeing programme
- Dementia focus – museum and theatre programme using a dementia café model to provide an offer to this group who were disadvantaged during the pandemic – supporting social interaction, memory and physical activity
- Frailty focus – using arts activities to maintain or bring back social connectedness and through that maintain a level of physical activity to support independence
- Care Home focus – as with the Sparks of Joy work to continue that offer and provide stimulation and interest for care home residents

- 3.8.2 It is proposed to allocate **£150,000** to facilitate further events under a dedicated programme of activity with a Covid-19 recovery focus.

3.8.3 Rotherham Show:

Should the proposals for Rotherham Show 2021 be taken forward for September, then investment would be required to support the delivery of a Covid-19 safe event (spreading over 3 days rather than 2 this year). The Rotherham Show would have a focus on bringing Rotherham residents back together with an acknowledgement of the year that we have all had. It is proposed to allocate **£50,000** to facilitate delivery of the Rotherham Show activity.

3.8.4 Neighbourhood Centres:

During the pandemic, with the closure of neighbourhood centres, existing resident social interaction and organised activity has been especially impacted. It is now essential that when the remaining Covid-19 restrictions are lifted on 19th July, that

there is a coordinated effort by the Council and its partners to reactivate and revitalise social activity and interaction, including the reopening of neighbourhood centres. The installation of Wi-Fi would bring many positive benefits. It would provide predominantly older and digitally excluded residents with access to free public Wi-Fi, in close proximity to their homes, enabling them to remotely access Council services, make use of social media to connect and socially interact, support social activities and host events, such as digital inclusion training offered by Rotherfed. The provision would also support the use of the spaces by Council services in support of agile working and the VCS, to deliver activity of benefit to residents general health and wellbeing, addressing for example, issues of social isolation and promoting activity in support of the Five Ways to Wellbeing.

3.8.5 There are no current proposals within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget to install Wi-Fi into the neighbourhood centres. Prior to the pandemic, public access Wi-Fi was installed in 6 of the 45 centres and there was an ambition to roll out further installation, in phases, to the remaining centres. The costs of installation at the first six centres were met from the HRA neighbourhood centres budget. Prior to the pandemic the centres budget had operated at a slight surplus of £35,000 in 2018/19 and £30,000 in 2019/20. This provided very modest budget headroom to carry out works to improve the centres, such as upgrading kitchen facilities, redecoration, replacing floor coverings, furniture, and installation of Wi-Fi. The impact of the pandemic has been that the centres have remained closed to residents. Consequently, the Communal Facilities Charge paid by residents for unrestricted use of the centres and which is the principal income stream into the centres budget, has been impacted. The Communal Facility Charge has been credited to rent accounts during the pandemic which has resulted in a £67,000 overspend in 2020/21 and an anticipated £40,000 overspend in 2021/22. There is therefore no available budget for investment, including the installation of Wi-Fi, in 2021/22. The use of COMF funding would therefore reinstate and accelerate installation of Wi-Fi into the centres. It is proposed that an investment of **£60,000** is set-aside to facilitate connectivity and running costs towards provision in 2021/22, in locations to be determined and agreed with stakeholders, following suitable site assessment.

3.8.6 **Safety of Covid-19 testing sites:**

There are currently four symptomatic Covid-19 test sites operating in the borough at Midland Road, East Herringthorpe Maltby and Dinnington. Two of these testing stations are situated on sites that are Council assets (Maltby Joint Service Centre and Herringthorpe Stadium), with a further site belonging to the Dinnington Resource Centre at Dinnington, and the Midland Road site held by the Mayoral Combined Authority. There have been a number security and safety issues in the borough at the testing sites including vandalism and anti-social behaviour, leading in one instance to a temporary site closure. Maltby Joint Service Centre and Herringthorpe Stadium do currently have CCTV, however these systems are not particularly well focussed on the areas in question. At Herringthorpe there is a floodlight column that could be utilised adjacent to the testing site, though the feed would need to be taken to the adjoining stadium. Whilst Dinnington Resource Centre holds the site at Dinnington, the Council have a presence within the adjoining Library at the Resource Centre which would be of benefit to both the Council and the users of both facilities.

3.8.7 It is proposed to invest an overall total of **£60,000** in additional security measure for the three locations (excluding Midland Road) including improved CCTV to reassure users and test site operatives as to site safety.

3.8.8 The operator of the Leisure site, Places Leisure, are supportive of the proposals as are the Trustees of Dinnington Resource Centre.

- 3.8.9 Intelligence support to better understand Covid-19 impacts in Rotherham:**
The pandemic has undoubtedly exacerbated inequalities that already existed within sections of our communities prior to March 2020. The recent work on the JSNA and data hub highlights some of the effects of Covid-19, but does not fully quantify the cohorts of impacted residents and service users, nor does it fully understand the problems these individuals and families will face moving forward. Data relating to people who for example, have been socially isolated and those who have experienced mental health and wellbeing issues exists to some degree. However, it is not necessarily joined up as a comprehensive and complete picture, nor has it yet been modelled to understand the different scenarios that may be faced as a result and where we can best focus our collective efforts to support people to rebuild their resilience and recover from the impacts of the pandemic. Modelling for future waves and potential impacts of any Winter restrictions is also key to avoiding situations where people are plunged into even more difficult circumstances, requiring the support of council and partners' services.
- 3.8.10** Existing performance and analytical resources within the Council are already fully deployed and at capacity through business as usual work and existing projects. There is however there is an opportunity to utilise the COMF money available, to fund additional short-term resources who can take a data science-led approach, fully immersing themselves in the data sets and case studies, extracting knowledge from different sources and, in a very targeted way, seek to develop our understanding of the inequalities that may have a bearing on both the current and future health and social care needs of Rotherham residents. They would also be able to identify gaps in the data that need to be developed. This development of a richer picture of Rotherham and its residents would enable a move towards a single and evidenced version of the truth, from which data would provide information and ultimately insights about resident needs.
- 3.8.11** In doing so, the Council would be in a much better position to understand the experiences and needs of not only those who are accessing our services already, but those who have had cause to access some Council services or different forms of support for the first time and as a direct result of the pandemic, as perhaps now likely to be impacted over the longer-term. It is proposed that two analytical resources are funded through to the end of March 2022, sitting within the business intelligence team within the Policy, Performance and Intelligence function, but working closely with Public Health colleagues. The cost of this would be **£100,000** for the remaining period through to the end of March.
- 3.8.12** In addition, a small amount of budget to be able to commission additional data gathering through partner agencies or organisations, where gaps in our available sources are identified, would enable the Council to develop a stronger evidence-base from which to base medium and longer-term recovery initiatives and service responses. **£50,000** for this activity would enable a comprehensive response to any gaps that are identified.
- 3.8.13 Investment into Homelessness Services – Move-on accommodation and essential support services:**
The Council's Housing Options Service has seen an increase in the complexity of demand for homelessness support during the pandemic, with families as well as couples and single people seeking support.
- 3.8.14** At the outset of the pandemic the Government placed a duty on Local Authorities to accommodate all those faced with homelessness and rough sleeping, including

those with no recourse to public funds. Further Covid-19 related measures imposed a restriction on household mixing, with only one private household to a home. This led to a significant increase in the number of people presenting as homeless and a resultant increase in temporary accommodation usage. Further pressures on temporary accommodation has also been created by a shortage of affordable housing, including housing with support services, within the social and private rented sectors.

- 3.8.15 During 2020/21 the number of households presenting as homeless was 1458. Of these, the dominant reason was due to family and friends not being willing or able to accommodate them, accounting for 611 cases. Of the 1458 cases, 1105 were placed into temporary accommodation. During 2021/2022 to date the total number of new homelessness cases is 260. Of these, 100 presented as homeless due to family and friends not being able or willing to accommodate them. Of the 260 cases, 230 have been placed into temporary accommodation.
- 3.8.16 In response to the increased demand and need for temporary accommodation solutions, the Council significantly increased its portfolio of temporary accommodation provision, which now stands at 114 properties. Despite this, due to level of demand and the lack of suitable permanent housing to move people on to, the Council has been reliant on the use of hotel accommodation. The provision of temporary/hotel accommodation has also played an important part in ensuring the safety of those at risk of rough sleeping. This has placed a significant pressure on the Council's general fund and the Homelessness Service. In mid-July the number of households currently placed in hotels had risen to 94 single people and 8 families, with 92 households in other temporary accommodation. There is no dedicated service budget for hotel expenditure. These costs have been covered by Covid-19 related grants with expenditure for hotel placements during the period 1 April 2020 to 31st March 2021 reaching £830,000.
- 3.8.17 In respect of move on accommodation options, there are still challenges in finding suitable accommodation, due to affordability and access to the right support. Those people with higher support needs would usually access appropriate supported housing or Housing First services. However, demand is exceeding current service capacity which is creating blockages in temporary accommodation. This is resulting in people remaining in temporary accommodation for longer, with general support from the Homelessness Service, but without the specialist support or accommodation that they need.
- 3.8.18 The proposal is to ease these immediate pressures by investing **£600,000** to procure critically needed additional support services to households with support needs, currently residing in temporary accommodation/hotels and move on accommodation and to increase the availability of suitable move on accommodation. The funding will enable:
- Procurement of additional specialist support service capacity to support up to 50 households with complex needs who are in temporary accommodation/hotels or move on accommodation, to help them journey to more suitable and sustainable accommodation, freeing up temporary accommodation capacity.
 - Procurement of additional high-level support to increase Housing First provision (supported housing accommodation) by an additional 10 units.
 - Additional dedicated specialist capacity, through the sourcing of a mental health practitioner and two drug and alcohol workers.

- 3.8.19 It is proposed that Registered Social Landlord's, operating in Rotherham, are contacted to request that they facilitate move on accommodation provision. Great Places Housing have already indicated that they would be prepared to offer 5 properties if the appropriate support services can be facilitated at the outset of the tenancy. It is also proposed that additional housing support capacity is sourced from within the existing supported housing services framework.
- 3.8.20 The expected outcomes from this proposal are:
- Reduction in time spent in temporary accommodation by offering move on accommodation with the appropriate support. (Range from medium to high level Housing First type support)
 - Reduction in spend on hotel placements, as a plan will be developed around the person so that they are able to move on to more suitable supported permanent housing.
 - Free up spaces in temporary accommodation to meet ongoing pressures and reduce the need for hotel placements.
 - Create sustainable tenancies for households with complex needs
 - Reduction in repeat homelessness cases where households have been evicted due to past issues/behaviour
- 3.8.21 It is essential that properties offered have the right support in place. Many of the people that have been accommodated temporarily have a range of issues and complexity in their lives, such as drug and alcohol issues, anti-social behaviour etc which if not addressed, could lead to tenancy failure and the risk of repeat homelessness.
- 3.8.22 The wrap around support is a much-needed resource to take pressure out of the system and create a more manageable and sustainable situation between now and March 2022.
- 3.8.23 **Support to the Voluntary and Community Sector:**
Further to preliminary discussions with the VCS, there is a strong appetite for a small grant programme to be co-designed and facilitated by the Council with organisations invited to bid into the process. The programme would have focus on supporting those coming out of shielding, bringing back community infrastructure lost due to Covid-19 and supporting reduced social isolation, linking into and complementing existing public health programmes and activity.
- 3.8.24 This could include, but not be limited to:
- Support to implement the community buildings guidance for Covid-19 safe operation.
 - ICT to assist with hybrid meetings and activities
 - Wi-Fi in non-Council owned community buildings
 - Mental Health First Aid/Mental Health literacy/Suicide prevention
 - Supporting children, young people and families; older people and other identified vulnerable / priority groups
 - Befriending and support for vulnerable and shielded people to access activities
- 3.8.25 An overall allocation of **£250,000** would have significant reach (up to c50 organisations) if successful bids were set at a maximum bid of £5,000. The organisation managing the grants process would need to cover their own

administrative costs so the number of grants will be slightly fewer than 50 if all are set at the maximum threshold.

- 3.8.26 Due to the additional administrative burden, it is proposed that the small grants be managed through a third sector organisation. The Council already holds a 3-year contract with Voluntary Action Rotherham (VAR) which started in April 2021 to provide VCS infrastructure support. The organisation has previously managed a successful small grants programmes for the Council. VAR also manage a health service contract to deliver social prescribing support.
- 3.8.27 This is all complementary activity to the purpose of the new small grants and it is therefore proposed that the infrastructure services contract be amended to include a schedule on managing the small grants programme. This schedule would include VAR's responsibility for organisational checking of grant applicants, agreeing and monitoring key outcomes for each grant and reporting to the Council on programme delivery. VAR would need to be paid a management charge which would be met from within this budget. The initial focus of the grants would be on the above priorities with a final list agreed through a co-design process with the VCS. Priorities may need to change over time to continue to meet changing needs; it may be that there is more than one round of applications to meet any changes in need.
- 3.9 The overall proposed expenditure against the COMF based on the options above is **£3.017m**. These proposals would account for most of the funding available. If all the proposals are agreed **£340k** will remain unallocated as a contingency to support targeted interventions as required during the national roadmap. Delegated authority for allocation of this contingency to the Director of Public Health (DPH) will be requested for future spend in line with the COMF.
- 3.10 The Council is expected to provide a return to government by June 2022 detailing all incurred expenditure against the COMF.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 With such a wide-ranging set of proposals it has been important to engage with Members including through a dedicated seminar hosted by the Council Leader.
- 4.2 Preliminary discussions have also been held between officers and prospective external organisations that may be able to deliver any commissioned or grant funded activity outlined in the proposals within Section 3 of the report above.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 Cabinet to consider proposals for COMF expenditure in accordance with the Council's financial regulations on the 16th August 2021.
- 5.2 Proposed external grants and commissioning activity to be expedited following receipt of Cabinet approval of the proposals. These will be underpinned by formal grant agreements or covered through existing contractual arrangements. All expenditure will be subject to monitoring arrangements.
- 5.3 Commitment of expenditure of the COMF will be facilitated prior to 31st March 2022.
- 5.4 The Council will report to government all expenditure of the COMF in the prescribed format by June 2022.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications (to be written by the relevant Head of Finance and the Head of Procurement on behalf of s151 Officer)

6.1 The table below summaries the latest position for the Contain Outbreak Management Fund including the proposed investments highlighted in section 3 of the report:

Description	£m
Balance carried forward into 2021/22	3.47
COMF Grant Allocation 2021/22	2.13
Total Funding available 2021/22	5.60
Committed – Test & Trace Team	-2.24
Unallocated Funding	3.36
Total Investment Proposals (Section 3)	3.02
Contingency	0.34

The proposals in section 3 of the report can be funded from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund. The grant guidance describes several suggested activities but also states that “The specific public health activities that can be funded from the COMF are left to the judgement of Local Authorities in conjunction with their Directors of Public Health.”. Several proposals rely on partners to deliver interventions and the demand from the community for further support. Alternative options may be required to ensure the funding is fully utilised. All expenditure must be incurred by 31 March 2022 in accordance with the grant conditions.

6.2 The details proposed in this report offer a range of differing interventions. Where these interventions seek to engage a third party for delivery under contractual terms, the provider must be engaged in full compliance with the Council’s own Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (as amended).

7. Legal Advice and Implications (to be written by Legal Officer on behalf of Assistant Director Legal Services)

7.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. Funds should be allocated in accordance with the associated policy/guidance to mitigate the risks of any legal challenge.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 There are no direct HR implications arising from this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 The proposals include a range of actions to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults. Delivery of the proposed actions will support recovery from the pandemic in the borough, with a specific focus on those groups which have been most affected.

9.2 The proposals will support educational recovery, improved mental health and increased access to youth support for Children and Young People.

9.3 Vulnerable Adults will be supported through a range of initiatives including with a focus on social isolation, support and advice, mental health, and cultural activity.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 The proposals cover a range of actions to mitigate the effect of the pandemic and likely to be positive benefits for protected characteristic groups and this will be monitored.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 No direct implications – impacts covered in the Carbon Impact Assessment at Appendix 3.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1. A range of proposals contained within Section 3 of the report will require partner involvement in delivery. VAR will have a significant role in the administration of the grant funding proposal.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 The key risk to the proposals is the ability to deliver the spending in year in line with the COMF grant conditions. All proposals have been developed with this in mind, and there will be a requirement for the officers delivering the initiatives to report to the Council's Recovery Gold group chaired by the Chief Executive Officer to enable the management of any slippage.

14. Accountable Officers

Ben Anderson, Director of Public Health

Nathan Atkinson, Assistant Director, Strategic Commissioning

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp	02/08/21
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	27/07/21
Head of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Bal Nahal	23/07/21

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