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| <b>Report on</b>         | Technical Services COVID 19 Service Delivery Impact |
| <b>Date of Meeting</b>   | 7 <sup>th</sup> July 2020                           |
| <b>Reporting Officer</b> | Raymond Lowry, Head of Technical Services           |

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| <b>Is this report restricted for confidential business?</b>         | Yes |   |
| If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon | No  | X |

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| <b>1.0</b> | <b>Purpose of Report</b>  |
| 1.1        | To provide Members with an update on any service delivery impacts for Technical Services as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic.  |
| <b>2.0</b> | <b>Background</b>   |
| 2.1        | During the pandemic various Technical Services employees were identified as vulnerable / at risk and were tasked to work from home (remote working). Members should note that all staff were available during this period with one member of staff volunteering for redeployment to assist Council in delivery of critical key services i.e. waste services. All other staff within the department worked remotely from home or came into the office in on occasions. The Technical Services Manager was available within the office during this whole period to ensure continuity of information was collated and processing of payments to ICT / IST contracts. |
| 2.2        | <p>The key functions of delivery for Technical Services are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capital Projects</li> <li>• Sustainability</li> <li>• Biodiversity</li> <li>• Bus Shelters</li> <li>• Signage</li> </ul>   |
| 2.3        | The main focus at the outset of the pandemic was the management of capital projects, ensuring the contracts were maintained where possible, and the “cash flow” of these businesses were maintained by prompt processing of payments. The government guidelines meant that various schemes that were “live” at the time had to have works suspended.  |
| 2.4        | The volume of work was considerable and with one staff member redeployed and another leaving the organisation, the decision to suspend activity on some aspects of the departmental work was taken – this included Bus Shelters and Signage.  |

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| <b>3.0</b> | <b>Main Report</b>  |
|            | <p><b>Capital Projects</b></p> <p>3.1 Due to COVID 19 guidance from CPD and central Government the following projects could not maintain labour forces or delivery of supplies and so were suspended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coalisland Public Realm</li> <li>• A29 Roundabout</li> <li>• Aughnacloy Changing Rooms</li> <li>• Villages – Pomeroy</li> <li>• Villages – Group 5</li> <li>• Davagh Forest Hub</li> <li>• Dungannon LC – snagging</li> </ul> <p>3.2 New systems and processes had to be implemented to ensure a proper audit trail of approvals for finance payments. Technical Services have processed in excess of £600k for works completed on projects since the lock down period. Initial IT obstacles relating to restricted access to electronic files were resolved at the early stages of the pandemic.</p> <p>3.3 Projects at design stage were maintained by having virtual meetings on platforms such as Microsoft Teams Zoom etc. and this ensure meetings were not cancelled and further progress could be made on these projects.</p> <p>3.4 During the pandemic discussions have taken place with all relevant funding bodies and they have been sympathetic to time lines and some are indicating that additional funding maybe available to cover COVID costs.</p> <p>3.5 <b><i>Moving Forward</i></b> – the projects noted above have now all came back on site and Technical Services along with the appointed ICT teams are processing claims for COVID 19 related costs and seeking all necessary procurement / legal advice to mitigate cost / programme overruns. Staff are now coming into the office on a more frequent basis of 2-3 days per week. Team meetings will progress through the virtual platforms as noted above which will save officer travelling time and also reduce mileage costs for the department.</p> <p><b>Sustainability</b></p> <p>3.6 The Sustainability Officer has been available and remote working since lockdown commenced. The Sustainability Officer's main focus of work consists of actively supporting the district's community sector to develop community food growing projects such as allotments or community gardens as well as involvement of the community / stakeholders in other initiatives to raise awareness of wider sustainability issues.</p> <p>3.7 Council's Sustainability function responded quickly and set up the 'Mid Ulster is growing from Home' project at the end of March. Since then the project has been successful in providing ongoing support and guidance to Mid Ulster's community</p> |

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|      | <p>gardening &amp; allotment groups as well as individual residents during the coronavirus pandemic and has helped them to grow some fresh food on their own at home during these difficult times. The support given is entirely via electronic communication and consists of weekly emails on various food growing and gardening activities at home to accompany the participating gardeners through this growing season. A full report on this initiative has been presented to the Environment Committee for information purposes.</p>  |
| 3.8  | <p><b><i>Moving Forward</i></b> – evidence from the Mid Ulster is Growing from Home project demonstrates that there has been a great uptake of gardening and food growing at home during the lockdown. Large numbers of people have turned to their own gardens to learn new skills, remain physically active and support their mental wellbeing during a phase of social isolation and crisis. These changes in habits towards healthier lifestyles can hopefully be maintained beyond the current crisis – especially if given a little bit of additional support in terms of resources and skills. It is planned to keep the project going throughout this growing season while adapting to changing circumstances which hopefully will allow us to re-introduce some elements of communal activities in the future in line with any further easing of restrictions and government guidelines. The project model will be used to develop further sustainability programmes during the second half of this financial year, subject to available budget.</p> <p><b>Biodiversity</b></p> |
| 3.9  | <p>The Biodiversity Officer has been available and remote working since lockdown commenced. April to July would usually be the busiest period with regard to biodiversity surveys, public events, etc. During the lockdown, the Biodiversity Officer has been encouraging local people to observe, record and take action for the wildlife in their own gardens. This includes emailing identification guides of various taxa and where to look online for further information. This has been supported by replying to individual queries.</p>   |
| 3.10 | <p>Since the easing of the lockdown, the Traad Bird Ringing program has been able to commence, albeit with a very limited number of people attending. Sticking to government guidelines, social distancing is maintained and there is no sharing of ringing equipment. Three sessions have been completed so far and the project is workable with guidelines adhered to. People wishing to attend will be on a rotation basis to ensure safety precautions are manageable. Future public gatherings will be arranged on a case by case basis, suitable to the relevant guidelines appropriate at the time.</p> <p><b>Bus Shelters</b></p>  |
| 3.11 | <p>For the latter part of March and April this function within the department was suspended to ensure Capital Projects were administered in accordance with all new guidelines. Stakeholders such as DfI roads and Translink / EA were unavailable due to their own crisis management.</p>   |
| 3.12 | <p>Since mid-May however the required staff and stakeholders are back on track and shelter applications are beginning to progress. Due to government guidance all meetings have taken place over the virtual platform and this has enabled the</p>   |

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|            | <p>relevant officers to comment on various applications. Moving forward this will be continued and it is envisaged that applications will progress in a more efficient manner.</p> <p><b>Signage</b></p>  |
| 3.13       | For the latter part of March and April this function within the department was suspended to ensure Capital Projects were administered in accordance with all new guidelines. Disruption in the Procurement service lead to a delay in the dual language signage / roads signage tender being released.  |
| 3.14       | Since mid-May however the required staff are back on track and the tender is now due for release in June and should be presented for award to Council in August / September. Due to government guidance all meetings have taken place over virtual platforms and this has enabled the relevant officers to comment on various aspects of the procurement documents. Moving forward this will enable Council facilities to have dual language signage installed internally and externally to the various facilities throughout the district. |
| <b>4.0</b> | <b>Other Considerations</b>   |
| <b>4.1</b> | <b>Financial, Human Resources &amp; Risk Implications</b>   |
|            | Financial: COVID 19 is likely to bring additional financial pressures to the Capital Framework programme.   |
|            | Human: Staff will be tasked to come back into the workplace and all necessary risk assessment will be carried out to ensure places of work are managed in a safe manner.  |
|            | Risk Management: Social distancing measures and risk assessments are in line with up-to-date government and H&S guidance to meet the specific needs of the service.   |
| <b>4.2</b> | <b>Screening &amp; Impact Assessments</b>   |
|            | Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/a   |
|            | Rural Needs Implications: N/a   |
| <b>5.0</b> | <b>Recommendation(s)</b>  |
| 5.1        | Members to note the content of this report.   |
| <b>6.0</b> | <b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b>  |
| 6.1        | None  |