

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	22 JUNE 2020		
TITLE:	COUNCIL RECOVERY PROGRAMME - CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC		
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report outlines the Council's approach to the Recovery phase of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic. This follows on from the report to Policy Committee on 24 March 2020 which explained the Council's initial response to the Pandemic (and a further update on 18 May 2020).
- 1.2 In order to plan and deliver the necessary work required in the Recovery phase, the Council will work with its partners in Berkshire and the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum under the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and relevant guidance. A number of different structures have been implemented for this work and these are described in the report.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

Policy Committee is asked:

- 2.1 To endorse the Council's response to the Recovery.

Appendix 1 - Pandemic Response Strategic Framework and Underlying Principles

Appendix 2 - Reading BC Recovery Structure Diagram

Appendix 3 - Local Resilience Forum Multi Agency Recovery Structure Diagram

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Government published "*Our Plan to Rebuild: the UK Government's Covid-19 recovery strategy*" on 11 May 2020 with a number of elements to support the gradual removal of lockdown restrictions whilst limiting the transmission of the virus. These strategies are being implemented throughout the country, e.g. phased reopening of schools and opening non-essential retail. The Government's approach to recovery is based upon a strategy of, "*saving lives; saving livelihoods*" and a "*return to life as close to normal as possible, for as many people as possible, as fast and fairly as possible ... in a way that avoids a new epidemic, minimises lives lost and maximises health, economic and social outcomes*".
- 3.2 The roadmap in the strategy envisages the way in which restrictions can be lifted on a step-by-step basis, e.g. for workers, for schools, on public transport, in public spaces,

whilst protecting the clinically vulnerable. Within the strategy there are fourteen supporting programmes:

- (i) NHS and care capacity and operating model
 - (ii) Protecting care homes
 - (iii) Smarter shielding of the most vulnerable
 - (iv) More effective, risk-based targeting of protection measures
 - (v) Accurate disease monitoring and reactive measures
 - (vi) Testing and tracing
 - (vii) Increased scientific understanding
 - (viii) "Covid-19 Secure" guidelines
 - (ix) Better distancing measures
 - (x) Economic and social support to maintain livelihoods and restore the economy
 - (xi) Treatments and vaccines
 - (xii) International action and awareness
 - (xiii) Public communication, understanding and enforcement
 - (xiv) Sustainable government structures
- 3.3 Members will note the broad range of activity which the Council will be expected to lead locally or support in partnership with others: protecting care homes; shielding of the most vulnerable; testing and tracing; economic and social support ... to restore the economy; public communication, understanding and enforcement.
- 3.4 Following an emergency such as a pandemic, local authorities are expected to work under the guidance which accompanies the Civil Contingencies Act 2004: "*Emergency Response and Recovery - October 2013*". The concept of Recovery within this guidance is wider than the Government strategy referred to above.
- 3.5 Within the guidance, it is noted that, Recovery is a complex and long running process that will involve many more agencies and participants than the Response phase. It is defined as the process of rebuilding, restoring and rehabilitating the community following an emergency. Local communities may also look upon an emergency as an opportunity to regenerate an area. Regeneration is about transformation and revitalisation. It is a complex social and developmental process rather than just a remedial process. There are four interlinked categories of impact that individuals and communities will need to recover from:
- (i) Humanitarian (inc. Health)
 - (ii) Economic
 - (iii) Infrastructure
 - (iv) Environmental
- 3.6 The manner in which Recovery processes are undertaken is critical to their success. Recovery is best achieved when the affected community is able to exercise a high degree of self-determination. Regeneration is both visual and psychological. This transformation can be physical, social and economic, achieved through building new homes or commercial buildings, raising aspirations, improving skills and improving the environment whilst introducing new people and dynamism to an area.
- 3.7 While the Response phase to an emergency can be relatively short, the Recovery phase may endure for months, years or even decades.
- 3.8 The management of Recovery is best approached from a community development perspective. It is most effective when conducted at the local level with the active participation of the affected community and a strong reliance on local capacities and expertise. Recovery is not just a matter for the statutory agencies - the private sector, the voluntary sector and the wider community will play a crucial role.

- 3.9 The starting point of a Recovery process is an impact assessment, a process which has been commenced by the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum. This process is iterative and based upon the input of the different partners.
- 3.10 The Council structures stood up for the Response phase of the pandemic, Gold and Silver command have done their job in dealing with a number of issues. Some of these workstreams have come to an end, others continue. The Response phase is still relevant, for example to support infection control in care homes, the Test and Trace function, and to deal with any possible second wave or local lockdowns under the local outbreak control plan. At the same time, new structures are proposed for the Recovery which will take account of the long term need to work with partners in a wider geographical context.

- 3.11 During the Response phase the Council identified a strategic framework for the duration of the emergency and recovery period during which its priority objectives are to:
- Support and protect vulnerable children and adults by ensuring the social care system continues to function effectively
 - Support the people who are most vulnerable and isolated in our communities
 - Support businesses and the local economy, and secure Reading's economic recovery

- 3.12 During the emergency Response phase a number of initiatives have been delivered under this strategic framework:

One Reading Community Hub - working with the voluntary sector, to provide support and shielding to the most vulnerable people in Reading. We also registered 1,000 volunteers.

Place Leadership - we brought together our key strategic partners within Reading to start the process of a coordinated recovery and renewal.

Safeguarding - ensuring regular weekly contact with 60 residents who were assessed as having higher levels of needs and vulnerabilities.

Care Homes - we provided a safe place for patients to be further assessed and recuperate after they were discharged from hospitals to ensure that we were not exposing vulnerable people to the virus in care settings.

Schools - we supported our schools and early years settings to provide education for key workers and vulnerable children. Our own Kennet Day Nurse also continued to provide a service.

ICT and HR - we gave staff the tools and support they needed to work effectively from home accelerating the Windows 10 roll-out and doubling the VPN capacity.

Excess deaths - we put in place robust plans and infrastructure to manage excess deaths arising from the pandemic.

Homelessness - housing all our rough sleepers and homeless and putting in support to help them adjust to the changes.

PPE - we ensured that all those agencies in Reading who needed access to emergency PPE to provide a frontline service got what they needed.

Democracy - we created a new governance structure to ensure that democratic oversight and accountability was effective.

Business support - we credited over 1,400 businesses with rate relief worth £53m and have allocated £24m in grants to support 1,750 small businesses through the crisis and we have launched a further discretionary grant fund.

Cultural services - we offered instant online library membership generating 500 new members and 10,000 downloads of ebooks and e-magazines. Reading Museum launched online resources that have been downloaded over 50,000 times, and generated over 1.2million views of their social media.

3.13 This strategic framework for the pandemic (See Appendix 1 for the supporting detail of the framework) sat alongside the Council's Corporate Plan 2018-2021 (which was refreshed in Spring 2019) and which set out the following six priorities:

- Securing the economic success of Reading
- Improving access to decent housing to meet local needs
- Protecting and enhancing the lives of vulnerable adults and children
- Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe
- Promoting health, education, culture & wellbeing
- Ensuring the Council is fit for the future

3.14 Full details of the Council's Corporate Plan and the actions which will deliver the priorities are published on the [Council's website](#) and demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.

3.15 As the Council now approaches the Recovery phase, it must again review its priorities for the foreseeable future in order that it can respond to the challenges now emerging as well as those to come. The existing corporate programme supporting the Corporate Plan continues, albeit that work under the programme has been refocussed to prioritise the Recovery aims.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Covid-19 has had significant impacts on the Council, our residents and our businesses:

Impacts on the Council

- Expected backlog of demand across a number of services
- Greater and more complex demand
- Demand from a greater range of customer types (with different expectations)
- Reduced revenue generation and income opportunities lost
- Increase in costs
- Delivery of savings programmes stalled or diminished
- Demands on staff to be adaptable and to cope with the threat of the virus, ill health and caring for dependents

Impacts on our residents

- Long-term health and well-being impacts of isolation re mental health, poverty, immobility
- Financial difficulties and homelessness
- Dealing with death and grief
- Inequalities for BAME people
- Disproportionate effects in our more deprived areas
- Escalation of health conditions from lockdown or those who have been affected by the virus
- Job losses and skills gaps opening up

Impacts on our businesses

- Severe effect on income and cashflow

- Risk of bankruptcy
- Increased indebtedness
- Likely to be a sustained period of low growth in all scenarios
- Stalled housing and commercial developments

4.2 As we mobilise for the Recovery, we need to identify the outcomes which we seek. These are suggested as:

- A thriving place and economy, with space to support all sizes of business, where people want to come and live, work and visit.
- An environment and economy underpinned by net zero carbon principles.
- A relentless focus to solve our health and wealth inequalities alongside our partners.
- A Council that embraces new ways of working for staff and new ways of accessing services for customers.
- A skilled population that feels part of a cohesive community and shares the benefits of the economic recovery.
- A financially sustainable operating model for the Council that delivers for our citizens.

4.3 Set out below are the Council's proposed strategic priorities for the Recovery phase of the pandemic. These priorities should be seen as a supplement to, but in no way a replacement of, the Corporate Plan, acknowledging that the context of the crisis requires a shift in focus. Recovery planning needs to be kept under constant review whilst the Response phase continues.

4.4 The Recovery plan seeks to cover the period from now until the end of the calendar year. It is envisaged that the impact assessment we will undertake, and the outcome of the Recovery work, will feed into the next Corporate Plan which will cover the period from 2021-2025. This will be considered by Members in January 2021.

4.5 The overall vision for the Recovery phase is:

To ensure Reading can be a thriving, virus-resilient community.

4.6 To achieve this there are three strategic objectives:

1) **To ensure the Council itself is resilient and fit for the future:**

- Protecting the health and wellbeing of our staff and customers
- Ensuring future resilience to pandemic viruses
- Learn the lessons from the emergency response and prepare for a potential second wave of the virus
- Restore services
- Adapting services so they meet the needs of a community living with the virus
- Ensuring we have the best possible online service access and great communication and engagement mechanisms available for the public
- Ensuring we are financially secure and making efficient use of resources

2) **To help people be safe and communities thrive:**

- Promoting the health, well-being and resilience of the community
- Dealing with hardship
- Assistance for those who have either had the virus and are recovering or those who have lost someone to the virus

- Provide information, support and assurance to the whole population disrupted by the pandemic
- Working to protect the vulnerable, people who are shielding and those who cannot leave home
- Safeguarding people with mental health problems, physical disabilities, the elderly and children at risk
- Developing creative solutions for delivering social care in the new context
- Strengthening our partnerships with voluntary and third sector organisations to help ensure Reading's residents can access vital support
- Preventing homelessness and supporting rough sleepers who were temporarily housed in the crisis stage into longer term solutions
- Helping the NHS and Public Health England promote the health of the community, supporting the test, track and trace efforts and providing support and advice to schools and other public services on keeping people safe
- Ensuring that schools can offer education for all children and that children with special educational needs are looked after well
- Ensuring that our parks, open spaces and riverside areas are excellent places for exercise, leisure and cultural activities
- Consider plans for memorials and other marks of respect

3) To secure the economic future of Reading:

- Protecting business and the economy as much as we can through the worst period of the crisis and help to re-launch the town's retail, cultural and leisure economy when it is safe to do so
- Ensuring our transport infrastructure plays its part in a recovery that delivers (a) better air quality, (b) a healthier local climate and population, (c) our zero-carbon plans, based on improved opportunities for walking and cycling, the restoration of safe public transport as soon as possible, and harnessing new sustainable technologies in the way we plan and travel in the future.
- Ensuring that environmental sustainability is complemented by social and economic sustainability, emphasising economic inclusion and socially-conscious models of business
- Working to help those affected by redundancy, unemployment and exclusion into further education, skills, training or work
- Support for learners and recent leavers who need educational and career support to move to the next stage of their life
- Effectively managing business support schemes
- Working with key partners (Reading UK, TVBLEP, Berkshire Coordinating Recovery Group) to progress the place shaping and economic recovery plans

4.7 Ensuring the Council is itself resilient and fit for the future is a strategy which is applicable to the Council's own operations and delivery of services. This strategy will be delivered through the **Operational Recovery Group** led by Jackie Yates, Executive Director of Resources.

4.8 Helping people be safe and communities thrive is a strategy which needs to be delivered with partners, particularly the voluntary sector in Reading and the health and social care sector. This strategy will be led by the **Social Regeneration and Voluntary Sector Group** led by Seona Douglas, Executive Director of Adult Care and Health Services.

- 4.9 Securing the economic future of Reading will require wide participation from businesses and partners and will be delivered through the **Economic Recovery and Renewal Group** led by Frances Martin, Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services.
- 4.10 All three groups will report into Corporate Management Team which will be the strategic co-ordinating group for Council's Recovery programme. Jackie Yates is the overall strategic lead for Recovery. A secretariat led by James Crosbie and reporting to Jackie Yates will support the Recovery function. This will ensure a co-ordinated function across the three groups so that cross cutting themes, issues and interdependencies can be reported into CMT. Appendix 2 illustrates the framework and the relationship between the different groups and priorities.
- 4.11 The structures set up in Reading mirror similar structures in the Thames Valley area under the Local resilience Forum. In discussion with other councils in Berkshire it has been agreed that the Thames Valley area is not a natural and cohesive economic area around which to build economic recovery and that therefore regional structures should be considered at the county level. Appendix 3 shows the corresponding structures under the Local Resilience Forum.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 Members will note that the aims overlap the Pandemic Strategic Framework and the Council's Corporate Plan and are consistent with both.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers). It will be important for recovery plans to reflect the commitments made in, and the urgency of, this declaration and section 4.5 above seeks to reflect this. A draft Reading Climate Change Strategy for 2020-25, produced by the Reading Climate Change Partnership with the Council's support, is currently the subject of public consultation. The consultation period has been extended partly to ensure that account can be taken of both the challenges and opportunities which the response to Covid-19 presents in working towards the aim of a net zero carbon Reading by 2030. Recovery will be relevant for the ongoing development and implementation of the strategy and reported to Members in due course.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to involve local representatives when carrying out "any of its functions" by providing information, consulting or "involving in another way". We have already started to consult with the voluntary sector and business community on how we should co-ordinate our work in the Recovery phase. Work has commenced on qualitative consultation through a customer focus group to inform the activities which will arise from the Recovery programme.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it

- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it

8.2 It is imperative, that in planning for the Recovery we look to protect the most vulnerable and marginalised in our society. Our revised priorities facilitate this. We will continually review our progress to ensure that we do not leave behind any section of our community.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The legal framework for responding to emergencies including the Recovery, is dealt with earlier in this report. There are no other legal issues arising directly from this report.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There have been significant financial implications in responding to this emergency both in terms of additional costs as well as reduced income levels and officers have put in place procedures to record and track both. Additionally, the refocusing of staff to deal with this emergency has meant that some savings are delayed or will not be delivered as planned. The Council's monthly budget monitoring arrangements will be used to formally report on the financial position. There will be additional costs arising as a result of the Recovery phase. However, our current estimates indicate that the Council could face a combined impact of increase of costs and a loss of income which amounts to approximately £15m in 2020-21 with further implications into subsequent years. A report on the Financial Implications of Covid 19 appears elsewhere on the agenda and in the absence of further Government funding, officers are reviewing options to mitigate the gap which will be the subject of future reports to Members.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are none.