

POLICY AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY PANEL

23 November 2020

CABINET

26 November 2020

FIRST STAGE COVID RECOVERY PLANS

Report of the Corporate Director (Strategy)

Recommendation to Policy and Performance Scrutiny Panel:

It is recommended that

- (1) the Panel consider the actions and proposals to support recovery from COVID 19, both as an organisation and in respect of supporting local communities, and make recommendations to Cabinet as appropriate.

Recommendations to Cabinet

- (2) It is recommended that Cabinet consider the report alongside any recommendations from Policy & Performance Scrutiny Panel.
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Summary

This report provides an update on the work on COVID 19 recovery to date. As this is an emerging situation the report and the appendices show proposed actions and a direction of travel that may be subject to change as circumstances evolve.

Statutory Powers

Civil Contingencies Act 2004, Coronavirus Act 2020 and miscellaneous legislation relevant to COVID 19

Strategic Implications

1. This report supports all the objectives in the Corporate Plan as it is a recovery plan for all communities within the Borough. There are workstreams in support of both Health and Wellbeing and Prosperous Place, with work underway with residents, voluntary community and businesses to identify the needs and opportunities both now and in the future. We have embedded the environment within all workstreams, and in addition are looking at the impact

of COVID 19 on our Environmental priorities, including our Climate and Environmental Emergency Action Plan.

Introduction

2. The Council's response to COVID 19 is being managed in accordance with emergency planning protocols. At the current time the COVID 19 incident is still in a 'response' phase with significant work taking place to ensure our services continue to be delivered, and particularly vulnerable residents are supported through the borough's Local Response Centre (LRC). However, it is good practice to start to consider recovery whilst still focusing on the incident to ensure that there is no delay in beginning to move forward. With the COVID 19 incident this is even more important and significant due to the length of the incident. Most emergency response incidents are very short, ranging from a few hours to a week. Whilst there have been some longer-term incidents in recent years (such as the significant flooding that hit Hampshire in 2014 and led to many Councils having to run their response centres for a few weeks) this type of incident is totally unprecedented.
3. The Council has been working on COVID 19 recovery for a few months now, but alongside responding to day-to-day COVID 19 issues as the Council is still managing a major live incident, as well as delivering business as normal. This has made it a slower process than ideally liked and has meant that at this stage many of the actions proposed in this report and supporting appendices are still at an early stage. In addition, we do not know what the future looks like and are responding to a continually changing situation. At the time of writing this report (first week of November 2020) numbers of cases have significantly increased and a second lockdown has just been imposed. This will inevitably direct resources away from recovery to ensuring services can continue to be provided. Further changes are anticipated making it hard to plan further at this time. In light of this the proposals in the appendices to this report may still be subject to change and in many cases show a direction of travel rather than confirmed deliverables.

Approach to Recovery

4. The Council is working on COVID 19 recovery at two different levels. A sub-regional level based on county borders, plus the Isle of Wight, and locally at a Borough level.
5. At the sub-regional level the Council is part of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) a formal partnership of agencies that manages an emergency response at a county level (geography-based not administration-based, which includes the cities and the Isle of Wight as well as Hampshire County Council and the 11 Districts). The LRF also includes other key partners such as Hampshire Constabulary, Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service, Public Health England the wider NHS (GPs, Hospitals), the military, and transport providers.
6. As well as managing the response to COVID 19 the LRF has a recovery workstream that the Council is part of, represented by the Corporate Director (Strategy) who is the Council's strategic lead for COVID 19, and the Chief

Executive who leads the LRF Finance Recovery Group. The issues managed at an LRF level are related to major infrastructure and issues that affect the wider area. In addition to the Financial Sub-Group, there are also sub-groups for Education, Communications, Health and Social Care, Business and Economy, Environment and Infrastructure and Community.

7. At a Borough level the Council has split recovery into four parts:
 - (a) Restart – the essential and other key services we have re-introduced in a COVID safe way
 - (b) Internal recovery – how the organisation has been impacted by the pandemic and what needs to happen to enable it to fully function and adapt to an emerging ‘new’ future
 - (c) External recovery – how the community has been affected by COVID 19, including residents, businesses and partners
 - (d) Response and Resilience, and Remember – how we have managed the response to the pandemic itself, what we can learn and improve, and how we can remember those people who have been impacted by the virus, or who have gone above and beyond to help during the incident.

Restart

8. Since the easing of the first lockdown over the summer the Restart Group has been meeting in order to re-introduce services in a safe and sustainable manner. However, following the introduction of a second lockdown from the 5 November 2020 some of these services have been suspended again.
9. The legislation is not as strict this time and we now have revised risk assessments and safe systems of work in place which have enabled us to deliver services in a COVID-secure manner. Therefore, we are confident that the vast majority of our services can continue to be provided. Whilst the second lockdown does not require play parks to close, it does require the closure of outside games areas. As a result, the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) at The Hub and others under the Council’s management have been closed in line with national guidance. Home visits can still be undertaken for essential services, where COVID 19 safety measures can be adhered to.
10. The restarting of food waste collections on 9th November will not be affected by the second lockdown as the new method is COVID safe.
11. Work to date has been based around prioritising essential services and those which have a significant financial impact on the Council and resuming these services will be our priorities once the second lockdown has been lifted. Restarting these services will be easier in second time round due to COVID 19-secure risk assessments, safe systems of work and working practices already being in place.

Internal Recovery

12. The internal recovery group was originally comprised of 11 workstreams. Many of these workstreams were cross cutting and part of our day-to-day work, such as financial recovery, corporate strategy and the Climate and Environmental Programme. Therefore, the actions from these workstreams are largely contained within the relevant corporate plans such as the Medium-Term Financial Plan or the Corporate Action Plan.
13. As result the focus of the internal recovery group is now focused on the health and wellbeing of staff and new ways of working.
14. Two staff surveys have been undertaken to-date. The results of these are shown in Appendix A (Wellbeing Survey) and Appendix B (Ways of Working Survey). The health and wellbeing survey was the first to be carried out and this revealed that most staff were coping well. The Head of HR and Head of Communications worked jointly on well-being campaigns. These involved top tips for maintaining good mental health including support from the Council's Mental Health Champions, learning and development programmes and signposting staff to specialist support if required.
15. The ways of working survey built upon the results of the health and wellbeing survey. This survey looked at the impact of working at home and asked about productivity and other issues to build a picture of the pros and cons of this approach, versus working full time in the office. Again, the results of this survey were largely positive. A draft action plan has been developed which has picked up the emerging issues from the survey shown at Appendix C.
16. It is intended that both surveys will be repeated around Christmas 2020.

External Recovery

17. The purpose of the external recovery team was to co-ordinate a recovery programme in the community to aid recovery from the effects of COVID-19 on the people who live and work in the borough. The programme aimed to consider the impact on our residents, businesses, community groups, community infrastructure, charities and health (mental and physical).
18. The objective was to aid the recovery of the wider borough such as non-council run services, and those factors that have affected the day-to-day lives of residents following the effects of COVID19.
19. The scope is far reaching and includes things that the Borough Council have little influence over; however, where the Council cannot directly affect such external factors, it flags them, lobbies for them at the relevant level and provides co-ordination if appropriate.

Workstream Overview:

20. The workstreams included in the External Recovery programme include Economy, Transport, Health and Wellbeing, the Voluntary and Community sector, and Town/Parish Councils.
21. Each workstream had a differing and very varied set of deliverables however, the starting point for every workstream was to define what recovery looked like to them. This included understanding what each area looked like pre-COVID 19, what has happened throughout COVID 19, and an estimation of how the landscape will be post COVID 19. It would be naïve to think that recovery for all areas will simply mean a return to exactly the same as pre-COVID 19 as something of this scale leaves permanent changes in society.
22. Appendix D details each of the workstreams and their objectives and aims, with a summary of the some of the key issues and themes which have emerged.
23. Each month the workstream lead produces a monthly highlight report updating on issues, achievements and changes either locally or nationally that may be impacting. The next piece of work for the workstream leads is to revisit the initial aims and objectives and update these against the latest impacts of the pandemic.
24. The Council has limited direct influence on many of the external recovery workstreams. Its purpose so far has been to monitor and log the issues to identify any gaps or problems where they exist. A lot of the external recovery effort to date has been focused on supporting town centres which have been particularly affected by the pandemic and is something we are set up to support through the Economic Development Team and Local Area Committees. In Eastleigh Town Centre, High Street and Market Street have been temporarily pedestrianised to allow for safer queuing and encourage footfall, and The Point have redirected resources that would normally be focused inside the Theatre, to organise activities encourage people to both come into town and stay for longer. In addition to the activities in Eastleigh, a new market has been set up in Hedge End, increasing footfall and vibrancy in the town centre.

Response and Resilience, and Remember

25. The Response and Resilience workstream has so far conducted two reviews looking at how the Council managed its response to the pandemic. The first one reviewed the strategic and tactical response whilst the second examined the business continuity response across the services.
26. The aims were to
 - To understand and review the engagement and involvement of the Council within the wider Local Resilience Forum
 - To evaluate the effectiveness of that engagement and highlight areas where this could be improved in future incidents.

- To review and evaluate the response phase to the incident internally through examination of the plans, business continuity, management structures and decision-making processes
 - To identify lessons learnt and training needs to improve the knowledge, understanding and skills of resilience functions across the Council in order to improve effective response in the future.
27. An action plan is being developed to implement the identified recommendations contained in the review reports to ensure that the Council is better placed to respond to any subsequent emergencies.
28. The Remember phase has just commenced its work through a small working group involving the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, staff and the Chief Executive of One Community. The group's objectives are;
- To explore and identify opportunities to celebrate the contributions of citizens of the Borough who went above and beyond to help
 - To identify appropriate ways of commemorating those Eastleigh citizens who have lost their lives as a result of the pandemic
29. The group recently met for the first time and explored ideas of how these objectives could be met. Initially it has been agreed to ask for nominations from the public to help identify Local Heroes in the Borough. An article to that effect will be in the next edition of the Borough News. The group will now meet monthly and will present proposals to the Recovery Coordinating Group in due course.

COVID 19 and Environmental factors

30. The Climate and Environmental Emergency Action Plan was updated in June, the plan reflected several changes due to the implications of COVID 19. One area significantly affected has been the Community Engagement Programme launched in February this year, which is now on hold as it is felt messaging would not resonate with the community at this time.
31. The Council has moved forward with several initiatives, such as electrification of Streetscene equipment and EV Charging.
32. Staff travel, commuting and working at home is included within the Council's Carbon Foot-printing, efforts are being made to ensure that the 20/21 Carbon report is able to reflect the wider impact of COVID 19 on Council emissions.
33. Waste has been particularly affected by the pandemic, with the temporary suspension of Food Waste Collections and significant increase in residual waste, likely due to the reduction in HWRC availability and people spending more time at home. The last six months up until October has seen a 3.4% reduction in the rate of recycling compared to the same period from the previous year.

34. Since 23 March, restrictions imposed due to the Covid19 outbreak caused a significant fall in traffic flow in the Borough. This would be expected to result in a corresponding drop in air pollution, but there are many factors which impact on measured concentrations making it difficult to attribute changes seen to a specific source. The hourly data collected does not show a significant fall in concentrations at this time, but it is thought this may have been masked by unusual weather conditions including strong winds in February and a high proportion of easterly winds in the second half of March and April. When looking at monthly averages there is evidence of a reduction in nitrogen dioxide levels compared to the same time period in previous years, with measured concentrations from March to May 2020 on average 30-40% lower in 2020 when compared to 2016-2019. It should be noted that all 2020 data is provisional until it has been ratified at the end of the calendar year.

Financial Implications

35. There are no direct Financial Implications to this report itself however the impact of COVID has impacted all services. The Council maintains a balanced budget for the medium term and full details can be found elsewhere on the agenda. It should however be noted that further lockdown periods and the future recovery of the economy could have a significant impact on the Council's finances.

Risk Assessment

36. Whilst the fact that plans are not specific at this stage makes planning for the future more difficult, there is a risk to forming a detailed and final plan at this time as the future is so uncertain. However, to not to start to plan for recovery would mean that the Council is unprepared both in terms of its own needs but also in respect of how to support local communities.
37. Whilst not specific to recovery itself (although recovery risks are included) the Council has a specific COVID 19 risk register which is revisited approximately every six weeks, this ensures at any risks associated with COVID 19 are managed effectively.

Equality and Diversity Implications

The Equality Act is not relevant to this report as it is not seeking a decision and therefore an Equality Impact Assessment has not been carried out. The individual actions in the appendices will be assessed separately if and when they are implemented.

Climate and Environmental Implications

38. The full and partial closure of operational sites during lockdown has led to a reduction in the Council's fuel consumption which is likely to lead to a lower overall Carbon footprint for 20/21.

39. In addition, as detailed above, restrictions imposed due to the COVID19 outbreak caused a significant fall in traffic flow in the Borough. When looking at monthly averages there is evidence of a reduction in nitrogen dioxide levels compared to the same time period in previous years, with measured concentrations from March to May 2020 on average 30-40% lower in 2020 when compared to 2016-2019. However, it should be noted that all 2020 data is provisional until it has been ratified at the end of the calendar year.

Conclusion

40. COVID 19 has challenged the Council and our community in many ways, a lot of which we had been able to plan for as a result of our Business Continuity work and through our Emergency Planning. However, some of it has been totally unprecedented and has led to the organisation having to work in totally new ways to deliver services and support our residents. It is anticipated that recovery will take years, and it is just the start of this process, in addition changes in circumstances such as the introduction of a second national lockdown on 5 November 2020 mean that recovery work will need to take a back seat. In this instance recovery is not a linear process and we anticipate that we will continue to move forward and back a few times.
41. The Panel are asked to consider the progress and proposed actions in the report and to make recommendations for specific areas they would like to see in the emerging recovery action plans.

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Appendices: 4

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - SECTION 100D

The following is a list of documents which disclose facts or matters on which this report or an important part of it is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. This list does not include any published works or documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information.