

# Cabinet

28 January 2021

## Council's COVID-19 Recovery Plan

### Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. Notes the progress on the delivery of the Council's Recovery Plan included as **Appendix B**,
2. Notes the proposals for re-prioritising, timescales and next steps in Section 3.

### 1.0 Background and context

- 1.1 The COVID-19 Pandemic is a global public health emergency that continues to have an unprecedented impact on our communities and economy. The Council's response to the pandemic remains the priority.
- 1.2 Following the subsiding of the first wave of the pandemic in the summer of 2020, a second wave more severe than the first grew to its peak in mid-November which triggered a second national lockdown that ended on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2020.
- 1.3 By Christmas there was a further significant surge in cases as a new more transmissible strain of COVID-19 was revealed in London and the south-east, spreading rapidly to other parts of the UK.
- 1.4 Restrictions according to tiering have been applied to local authority areas, with regular reviews to ensure that the tiered restrictions are effective to respond to trends in cases. By the start of 2021, Warwickshire became subject to more stringent Tier 4 restrictions, the highest tier.
- 1.5 On the 5<sup>th</sup> January, England entered its 3<sup>rd</sup> national lockdown, with schools moving to providing remote learning and only open to receive vulnerable children, and children of key workers.
- 1.6 Clearly there is a difficult period ahead, but there is good reason for optimism in the medium term. The UK's vaccination programme started on the 8<sup>th</sup>

December 2020, three vaccines have been approved, and there is a focus on the vaccination of priority groups of the population.

- 1.7 The ongoing response to the pandemic has impacted on the pace of the delivery of the Recovery Plan. As shown in the table below, when the Recovery Plan was approved in September, it was planned that a 6-month **consolidation stage** would follow to mobilise the Recovery Plan by March 2021.

Foundation stage (0 – 3 months)	Consolidate stage (3-9 months)	Accelerate stage (9 months plus)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standing up and reinstating Council services and work settings</li> <li>• Picking up immediate opportunities and activity to support communities and business.</li> <li>• Establishing recovery governance and approach</li> <li>• Engaging with regional approach to setting recovery priorities</li> <li>• Taking stock of change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detailed regional impact assessment</li> <li>• Establish recovery programme at regional, county level</li> <li>• Mobilise the Council's Recovery Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Longer term recovery for the Council, communities and economy</li> <li>• Taking time to understand the scale of future challenges</li> <li>• Reproduce the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Council Plan for 2021/22</li> </ul>

- 1.8 This report provides Cabinet with details of the progress against the Recovery Plan to date. The third national lockdown also provides an opportunity for further innovation and learning, which the organisation is seeking to pursue vigorously. Teams are being encouraged to experiment and capture learning points on a regular basis, with simple systems being established to capture learning more proactively and in real time than we were able to during the first national lockdown. This will inform the refresh of the Council Plan, Recovery Plan and Change Portfolio, and build on very significant acceleration of the Council's organisational development and culture during the Pandemic.

## 2.0 Recovery Plan Update

- 2.1 First and foremost, the Council continues with its immediate and on-going response to COVID-19 through the following:
- Backward contact tracing with associated governance and local outbreak response models
  - Providing shielding support and advice offer for the clinically extremely vulnerable
  - Delivering additional support for the vulnerable/at risk post shielding

- Mass targeted testing locations in each district of the county delivering lateral flow tests to the asymptomatic
- COVID-19 specific business support, area specific regeneration schemes/projects and key sectors
- Supporting schools to deliver mass testing and stay open
- Support for care homes and care home staff
- Provide a PPE supply line to all Council services and voluntary and community service organisations, and provide back-up supplies to health and public sector partners
- Working from home for the delivery of Council services, balanced with a need for only exceptional workplaces in operation, together with managing staff well-being and business need.

2.2 As a reminder, the Council's COVID-19 Recovery Plan is attached as **Appendix A**, and it continues to focus on the following 10 priorities that are linked to our Council Plan outcomes. Each of these priorities will be supported by a set of specific actions:

### **The 10 Recovery priorities**

#### **Council Plan 2025 Strategic Outcome – Warwickshire's communities and individuals are supported to be safe, healthy and independent**

- **Contain the virus and promote physical and mental health and wellbeing:** Promote the health and wellbeing of our communities, contain the spread of COVID-19 locally and target action to protect our most vulnerable residents and communities.
- **Maintain resilient and sustainable services:** Manage increased demand for services, especially hospital and social care services, and strengthen the care market.
- **Help our children and young people catch up on their education:** By returning to learning, improving access to digital resources and tackling attainment gaps.
- **Harness the power of our communities to tackle inequality and social exclusion:** Champion equality and tackle the effects of poverty, vulnerability, isolation, loneliness and domestic violence; and support this by promoting increased and sustainable social action, volunteering and community capacity.

#### **Council Plan 2025 Strategic Outcome – Warwickshire's economy is vibrant and supported by the right jobs, training, skills and infrastructure:**

- **Support business and grow the economy:** Build confidence in local businesses. Re-purpose town centres and create the conditions for business innovation to drive economic growth.
- **Stimulate job creation and skills:** Work with our partners in the Local Enterprise Partnership and higher and further education, to invest in getting people back into employment, or starting their careers, supporting skills, training and re-learning.
- **Invest in regeneration and a sustainable future:** Invest in the regeneration of local areas, support housing growth, a fit for the future digital infrastructure and sustainable transport.

#### **Support delivery of our outcomes by making the best use of resources and tackling climate change:**

- **Climate change:** Make sustainability and tackling climate change central to our recovery so that we lay the foundations for a sustainable long-term future.
- **Develop our people and future ways of working:** Invest in a sustainable and resilient workforce through recovery, learning from COVID-19 to embed flexible working, promote well-being and develop new ways of working.
- **Deliver high performance by harnessing digital, data and making the most effective use of our resources:** Use data and technological solutions to drive investments and high performance; and develop a new framework to measure performance, investments and financial management.

2.3 Our Recovery Plan continues to be under-pinned by a set of principles. These principles will guide how we deliver each of our 10 Recovery priorities:

#### Recovery principles

- **Target recovery activity and support to where most needed** through evidence-based decisions and focusing on priority outcomes and agreed priorities.
- **Stabilise and accelerate the recovery** for Warwickshire's people, places and businesses, including the recovery of Council Tax and Business Rates.
- **Tackle inequalities** – helping our most vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens and communities overcome the negative impacts of COVID-19.
- **Join up and work in Partnership** – maximise connections with partners (public services, private sector, communities, voluntary sector and citizens) to speed up recovery.
- **Focus on long-term environmental challenges** – use recovery efforts to accelerate Warwickshire's climate change ambitions.
- **Apply our learning from COVID-19** – utilise learning and good practice to improve the Council as an organisation, deepen collaboration and partnership working, and strengthen place and systems-based working across Warwickshire.

2.4 The current position with regards to the delivery of the COVID-19 Recovery Plan is attached as **Appendix B**.

2.5 There are over 120 activities set out in the Recovery Plan across the 10 priorities. The activity is a mix of business as usual and specific projects and programmes, some of which were planned as part of the Council Plan, some are additional pandemic recovery projects.

2.6 In summary, there is significant positive progress across all priorities. Nearly all activity has started with varying degrees of progress, including 51 activities in the development stage yet to go live. There are only a small number 17 that are at risk or are compromised, which is a fair reflection and in line with what might be expected given ambition of the Recovery Plan and the environment in which the Council is working.

### **3.0 Re-prioritisation, Timescales and Next steps**

- 3.1 During the first wave of the pandemic our recovery planning followed a sustained period of response. For this current wave we have made some progress on recovery where capacity exists, but it must be recognised that the severity and intensity of the current wave of cases, the impact of lockdown on the Council's capacity and additional demands, together with an increased level of testing and support to our most vulnerable means that we must remain focussed on our COVID-19 response together with urgent business as usual activity as our priority.
- 3.2 However, the Recovery Plan remains in place and its delivery will continue into the coming year 21/22 and further progress reports will follow in due course. Thereafter, ongoing recovery work will be consolidated into the update of the Council Plan for the start of 22/23.
- 3.3 This naturally creates issues of prioritisation, but also highlights a necessity to adapt and change to focus resources and attention on the immediate response and highest impact recovery activities. As a result, it is proposed that the following approach be taken to re-prioritising certain activity, and this be reviewed when there is clarity around ending the current lockdown, and the course of the pandemic and recovery thereafter.
- Work on the new performance framework be paused, including the engagement with the cross-party working group. It is proposed that the work is restarted post elections, and it becomes part of the next business cycle for 22/23.
  - The current performance framework for 20/21 - for Q3 a minimal approach, meaning data collection only without collating the detailed performance commentary. This will ensure data is kept up to date to complete year end supporting the closure of accounts and completion of the Annual Governance Statement. Subject to the course of the pandemic, year-end performance reporting is currently envisaged to go ahead as normal.
  - There be a roll forward of the current performance measurement for 21/22, with any adjustment to measures by exception. Quarterly reporting using Power BI continues for 21/22.
  - Full business plans for 21/22 will not go ahead. Instead a plan on a page will be produced for each service to capture the priorities and deliverables for 21/22 covering pandemic response and recovery, and change projects and programmes to deliver the Council Plan. The performance measurement for 21/22 based on the delivery of the Recovery Plan, the current Council Plan and any Commissioning Plans, together with the parameters set by the MTFs will suffice. Business Plans cycle restarted in the summer in preparation for 22/23.

- The Recovery Plan stays in place, alongside the existing Council Plan - there will be no refresh of either.
- A full refresh of the Council Plan will go ahead as planned as part of the business cycle for 22/23 which allows for input / direction from Members post elections. This would also include building in time for any public engagement.
- Implementation of the new Risk Management Framework will be picked up as part of the new Business cycle for 22/23.
- Progressing the delivery of Agile working – building on the accelerated progress the Council has made from the experience of remote working, this will be progressed with those staff who have already indicated a wish to move to the new arrangement and any new staff coming forward. Work on wider adoption will continue later, according to any adjustments needed for wider rollout.
- Other cyclical tasks concerning formal individual performance management approaches e.g. Appraisals and objective setting be paused. Regular close contact with all staff through one to one's and team meetings is essential and continues, as does prioritised online training.
- Scrutiny review - continue as planned with the report going to Leaders and Deputies and then Overview and Scrutiny Committees in February. Secure feedback and input so that final arrangements can be approved and launched post elections.
- Elections - continue with preparations until such time as Government makes an announcement that the elections will not take place as planned.
- Property rationalisation - continue with proposals for report to Cabinet in February. Further report on wider portfolio will follow, depending on capacity for Directorates to engage in consultation.
- Our People Strategy - continue with priority delivery themes as Covid response/ workload allows. Work on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion will continue within existing resources.
- Constitutional review – continue with what is required to ensure Contract Standing Orders are EU exit compliant but pause other activity. This will provide opportunity for any wider changes to be considered and taken forward post elections.

3.4 The Council has continued to progress crucial elements of work during this time which whilst not part of the Recovery programme will enhance the way we approach recovery from COVID-19, including:

- Developing core strategies including – Health & Wellbeing, Data and the Local Transport Plan
- Monitoring and responding to EU Transition (Cabinet Report – December 2020)
- Reviewing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) for recovery and key policy areas – health, education, economy.
- Establishing a refreshed strategic risk management framework
- Creating the Residents Panel capability – currently out for tender

3.5 Looking ahead, uncertainty levels will continue to be high and our need to be both agile and flexible in the way we plan and work will be key. This will be challenging and our expectations must be realistic according to our capacity to deliver in this most intense period of responding to the pandemic, but also a real opportunity to be innovative and creative, taking on board much of the learning and experience from the way in which we have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic to date.

3.6 In doing so it will be critical that we align and join up activity and approaches wherever possible. Specifically, for recovery this will mean:

Alignment of our Recovery wider policy issues:

- Devolution following publication of the anticipated White Paper
- Integrated Care Systems – consultation currently live
- The Comprehensive Spending Review
- Re-instatement of Inspection activity (paused in the first wave of the pandemic)

Alignment of our Recovery to partners and stakeholders

- The emerging Anchor Institutions agenda for Coventry & Warwickshire
- West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Recovery community and economy prospectus'
- Coventry & Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership
- Continued close working with our District and Borough Council partners
- Ongoing development and enhancement of our partnerships with the voluntary and community sector partners to progress implementation of our Voluntary and Community Sector strategy

3.7 It is intended that March and April 2021 are used to take further stock of our position and performance in the context of COVID-19 response and recovery. We are exploring the engagement of the LGA Peer review to support this work

3.8 This will position significant activity post-Election and early in the 2022/23 planning cycle to embark on a full refresh of the Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy as well as all associated core strategies for publication in February 2022.

- 3.9 Looking ahead, this approach connects recovery to our overall direction and approach, making it part of what we do and fundamental to our commitment of *making Warwickshire the best it can be*.

## 4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The cost of the response to Covid-19 to Warwickshire County Council is currently estimated to be in excess of £56m, with the figure likely to grow as national restrictions to businesses and communities continue.
- 4.2 This response cost has so far been covered in full by government funding, and it is anticipated that direct response costs will continue to be covered in the same way, but there are recognised unfunded financial impacts in the longer term if there is not a rapid and sustainable economic recovery.
- 4.3 These impacts stem from two areas: Reduced income from Council Tax and Business Rates and increased demand for community and social services from residents impacted by an economic downturn and the social damage caused by the pandemic.
- 4.4 The Medium-Term Financial Strategy Refresh 2021-2026 is based on a 0% tax base growth in 2021/22, 1% in 2022/23 and 2% thereafter. Prior to 2020 the assumption was 2% per annum growth, and each % is equivalent to approximately £3m per annum, meaning that the impact of slower tax base growth is the most significant part of the MTFS.
- 4.5 Similarly, Business Rates tax base is assumed to reduce by 5% in 2021/22 and then remain at this level for the remainder of the medium term, with a £3.5m per annum impact on funding. Both funding streams are directly influenced by the economic situation in the county and will have a material impact on savings required if recovery is faster or slower than estimated.
- 4.6 The combination of the £20.4m revenue investment funds and unallocated capital investment funding agreed in the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020-2025 adopted in February 2020 are the primary sources of funding for recovery initiatives, with a small number of projects being funded from Government COVID-19 Grant funding. The projects allocated funding so far are listed in the table as **Appendix C**.
- 4.7 Where one-off funding is requested from revenue investment funds or capital investment funding, business cases will continue to be submitted and feed into the Gateway process for the relevant investment fund. Where funding requests are over £100k for revenue bids or for all capital bids, these will come back to Cabinet for formal approval.

## 5.0 Environmental Implications

- 5.1 The importance of environmental considerations within the Council's recovery approach are reflected in both the proposed recovery priorities and principles.



## Background papers

None

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Local Member(s): None

Other members: Cllr Kaur, Cllr Warwick, Cllr Singh-Birdi, Cllr O'Rourke, Cllr Boad, Cllr Falp

**Appendix A – the Recovery Plan**

**Appendix B – the Recovery Plan update position**

**Appendix C – Recovery Projects with approved investment funding**