

Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Covid-19 Recovery

24 June 2020

Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. Receives and comments on the County Council's approach to Covid-19 Recovery, as set out in the attached Cabinet report.
2. Comments on the specific issues relevant to the remit of this Committee that should be considered in the development of the Recovery Plan which is due to be submitted to Cabinet in September.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This paper aims to provide an overview of the Council's approach to recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, as set out in the attached paper, considered by Cabinet on the 11 June.
- 1.2 Key to this work will be the development of a Recovery Plan that will be submitted to Cabinet for approval in September. This report seeks this Committee's comments on the approach to the development of the Recovery Plan as relevant to the remit of the Committee.
- 1.3 Following approval of the Recovery Plan, Overview and Scrutiny Committees will continue to have a role to play in recovery, particularly over the longer term as we move into the delivery phase. We will be building consideration of how we best achieve this into our review of scrutiny which we had planned pre-Covid and which we are preparing to restart in the coming weeks.

2. Supporting Information

- 2.1 For the past three months the Council has focused on responding to the Covid-19 crisis, working closely with key partners, locally, regionally and nationally.

2.2 Attention is now focused on developing a longer-term plan to support recovery from the crisis. Our Recovery approach includes the following key elements, with further details in the attached Cabinet report:

- Principles and objectives to guide recovery
- Efforts at local, county, sub/regional and national levels
- Phasing of efforts over:
 - Foundation: 0-3 months
 - Consolidation: 3-9 months
 - Acceleration: over 10 months
- Four themes of the recovery approach, focused on:
 - Place, Economy & Climate
 - Community and Voluntary Sector
 - Health, Wellbeing and Social Care
 - Organisation, including the reinstating of services
- Engaging Members, staff, partners, business and the public on our recovery planning.

2.3 We are now in the Foundation stage and focusing on:

- standing up and reinstating WCC services in line with the national guidance about Covid-secure spaces, including workplaces;
- seizing immediate opportunities to support communities/business;
- establishing recovery governance and approach; and
- engaging with the regional approach to setting recovery priorities including participating in the regional citizens' panel.

2.4 The key output from this phase will be a Recovery Plan that is presented to Cabinet for approval in September.

3. Focus of Response and Plans for Recovery

3.1 During the pandemic, the Council has worked flexibly and adapted in many ways to ensure that the residents, communities and businesses continued to receive key services and were supported to cope with the effects of Covid-19.

3.2 Examples of the responsiveness and actions taken by services within the remit of this Committee, include:

Supporting vulnerable residents in lockdown

- Rapid setting up and coordination, with District and Borough Council partners, of Shielding Hubs to provide support to Tier 1 and 2 vulnerable people who are having to stay in isolation due to medical

conditions. This has included setting up a dedicated hotline number through the Customer Service Centre which has operated 7 days a week, a series of high-profile communications campaigns to raise awareness of the support on offer and coordination of support from public and VCS partners.

- Our support for vulnerable people through the Shielding Hubs has delivered: over 9000 food parcels; handled over 4700 in-coming calls and made over 6,500 calls through our dedicated Covid hotline. Fire & Rescue staff/Firefighters delivered approximately 150 food parcels for Ediblelinks and 50 prescription medicines each week.
- We are working with DEFRA to enable vulnerable people gain access to on-line delivery slots from specific supermarkets.
- Established a model for receiving and processing daily lists of residents that were classified as shielded from MHCLG. This involved receiving and analysing data on over 20,000 individuals in Warwickshire, keeping up-to date records of the list to identify who had registered to receive support, those individuals (over 8000) who had not responded to their national letter, sharing these with District/Boroughs and coordinating welfare calls to ensure that vulnerable people had not fallen through the net.
- Created a web-based dashboard that provided all partners with 'live' information on the number of people that are shielded, the food parcels being delivered and calls into the 0800 hotline. The data was disaggregated to District/Borough level to enable local planning.
- Introduced an e-voucher system for the WCC Welfare Scheme and revised the criteria to ensure the most vulnerable residents have food and gas/electric. Following school closures, we immediately mobilised the Welfare Scheme to provide Free School Meal support to eligible families. Over 7000 children were supported for six weeks and we continue to support children on Alternative Provision or those who are not on yet on a school roll with weekly support.

Keeping residents safe and informed

- Providing a dedicated page on our website and running active campaigns, to help residents and businesses access information and advice on Covid-19.
- The creation and maintenance of a directory of local mutual aid groups, with improved usability, which allowed residents to search for local groups offering specific support. At its peak, the directory contained around 275 groups across the county. We are continuing work to identify where these groups are/were located, and more importantly where any gaps exist.

- Welfare calls, offering support and befriending service to 1000 elderly and vulnerable individuals identified through Mosaic data by Fire & Rescue.
- Fire & Rescue supporting hospital discharges through provision of transport, ensuring supplies of essentials and safe and well assessments of homes, thereby reducing pressure on the Ambulance service and hospitals.

Supporting our economy and vital sectors

- Provision of legal advice on changes to urban realm to ensure that as lockdown and activity rules changed, people can move safely around the county on foot, by bike and by car.
- Implemented immediate payments for all suppliers to aid businesses' cash flow and the rapid payment of grants to all Warwickshire Care Homes to aid infection control.
- Fire & Rescue advice and assessments to help the re-purposing of buildings for healthcare use.

Adapting and accelerating for lockdown

- Accelerated procedures through Your HR to enable speedier recruitment and decisions on HR issues.
- Advising on rapid legislative changes and their impacts upon communities, the council and service delivery, including urgent decision requirements and the implementation of rapid response activities.
- Bringing in of virtual committee and council meetings to ensure the democratic process could continue to operate and that transparent decision making was preserved.
- Rapid move to online provision of many services to ensure continued access by customers, such as the move to virtual school appeals process providing continued access to statutory entitlements of parents and children in Warwickshire.
- Speedy cultural adaptation by staff to working from home, using 'Teams', mobile and digital technology, streamlining decision-making, adopting new cross-council and cross-partner collaborations to help innovate service provision and ensure rapid responses during the pandemic and in the planning for recovery.

Maintaining WCC core services

- Maintaining and accelerating the delivery of core services across the period including payrolls for WCC, schools, grants to care homes and a range of other customers.
- Rapid roll-out of mobile working equipment to enable staff to work from home, developing organisational guidance on flexible working, additional equipment purchase, absence and isolation, identification of and letters to keyworkers, antibody testing for staff and the reassignment of staff to priority service areas.
- Pay arrangements for different categories of works – especially those who work irregular patterns or have no set hours of attendance.
- Cross council work with the Coroner and Warwickshire Funeral Directors, involving WFRS, Public Health and Registration Services to share public health guidance, digitise registration arrangements and ensure a dignified and respectful approach to funerals across the county.
- Maintaining a continual focus on our approaches to staff Wellbeing, including measurement and reporting systems and regular video briefings for staff by senior managers which have been warmly welcomed by most staff.
- Fire & Rescue hook arm specialists supported waste removal at Warwickshire landfill site.

Supporting resetting and recovery

- Coordinating work across the Council on standing services back again through a phased and prioritised approach. This includes undertaking risk assessments, preparing settings by defining procedures for control access, creating social distance plans, reducing touch points, specifying cleaning regimes, preparing the workforce and digitising what we cannot stand up.
- Supporting work on planning for recovery and leading on the organisation and community-voluntary community sector themes. This will include a consideration of the lessons learnt from our response phase and the implications for the future role of the council as we move into recovery.
- Working with/across our Directorates, with Members and partners to plan for recovery and reform. This includes establishing time-limited Member Working Groups to provide advice and support to Cabinet in the development of our Covid-19 Recovery Plan.

- Instigated regular financial monitoring of Covid-19 impact to support organisational decisions around response, recovery and financial planning.

3.3 As we emerge from the immediate response phase and move into the planning for recovery, there will be a role for the Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider aspects of recovery as are relevant to its remit. Of relevance to this Committee will be the work on organisational recovery and the future role of the Council. This will include the lessons learnt from our response to Covid, how well we adapted service provisions, decision making and our working culture, the use of data for improved planning, the further use of technology, staff engagement to aide innovation, the implications for our People and Property strategies and learning from other councils.

3.4 It is intended that there will be further opportunities for input from Committee Members as we move into the delivery phase from October onwards and further reports will be brought to the Committee for consideration.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 Work on the change portfolio/Recovery planning will be funded through the Organisational Change fund; the investment funds created in the MTFs are available to support one-off investments which will support recovery effort. The refresh of the rolling five-year MTFs from 2021-22 onwards will be the key mechanism for incorporating longer-term financial impacts of Covid-19.

5. Environmental Implications

5.1 There are no direct environmental implications of the proposed recovery approach. Climate change is one of four recovery themes proposed and being considered through the 'Place, Economy and Climate'.

Appendices

1. Appendix 1 - Cabinet Report, 11 June 2020, Covid-19 Recovery and Reform.

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Background Papers

None

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

Local Member(s): None

Other members: None