

Cherwell District Council

Executive

16 June 2020

<p>Covid 19 Recovery Planning <i>Re-start, Re-cover, Re-new</i></p>

Report of Chief Executive

This report is public

Purpose of report

To set out Cherwell District Council's approach to post COVID-19 planning and recovery following the national period of lockdown and a prolonged period of operation within an emergency response context.

1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To note the contents of the report and endorse the approach to planning for recovery for the immediate, transitional and longer term as set out.
- 1.2 To request that officers continue to work within the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum (TVLRF) framework with a specific place-based focus on the needs of Cherwell District within that context.
- 1.3 To agree that the Joint Cherwell District and Oxfordshire County Council's Member Partnership Working Group co-ordinates all partnership related recovery work.
- 1.4 To note the financial impacts as set out and request that officers prepare financial and transformational plans which align with the organisation's policy response to COVID and its impacts. This should include refreshing the medium-term financial plan and savings targets, renewing the Council's corporate plan and undertaking consultation and impact assessments as required.
- 1.5 To note that the Council's workforce has been key to the Cherwell response to the pandemic and to ask senior officers to ensure there are effective organisational development plans in place to engage, support and develop the workforce to address the short, medium and long-term consequences of COVID-19.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 The impact of the coronavirus pandemic has been profoundly felt across the country and indeed the world. Our thoughts are with those affected and we stand alongside Cherwell residents and local businesses who are working hard to maintain their day to day lives. As a district council we recognise the role we play in supporting the national recovery effort and our focus will be on addressing the impacts felt at the local level.
- 2.2 Following 'lockdown' on March 23 the council has been securely and effectively operating its services remotely. Services have been adapted to run in lockdown and as this period eases the new challenge of social distancing will require further development and flexibility. The Council pays tribute to all our staff, who have admirably responded to the challenge, and to local community, voluntary and faith groups who have worked tirelessly to support the people of Cherwell.
- 2.3 As well as the challenges of standing services up as lockdown eases, Cherwell District Council (CDC) will be expected to contribute to the national recovery efforts in terms of the longer term and the plans to deal with local outbreaks.
- 2.4 CDC is therefore planning to adopt a three phased approach to recovery planning, considering the immediate horizon and how services are restarted, the transitional horizon, how we adapt and implement preparedness plans for a local outbreak and the longer term including the economic and social consequences of the pandemic.

3.0 Report Details

Planning for the immediate horizon

- 3.1 Planning for the restarting of our services is well underway. Appendix 2 sets out our policy for the opening of council buildings and appendix 3 provides an overview of our operational status. It should be noted that in line with national policy the council will continue to ask employees to work from home wherever possible. Support and flexibility will be offered to accommodate this. Likewise, Councillors will also be asked to work from home, with appropriate IT support, and on-going arrangements to hold public meetings online.
- 3.2 Nearly all council services have remained operational during lockdown. However, several have had to adapt what they deliver. The move towards digital delivery has been largely effective and we need to continue to invest and develop our capabilities to deliver our services remotely in the future. Where digital delivery has not been possible some council staff have been in the workplace and appropriate workplace social distancing measures have been put in place.
- 3.3 This approach will continue, and it should be noted that new ways of working will need to be developed, for example reviewing how we handle cash, face to face service delivery and how we use our buildings to provide safe access and movement. We will need to communicate with our customers, so they understand the changes we need to make to our services and provide support to access for those who need it.

3.4 In terms of planning for the restart of services that have been suspended or significantly curtailed during the outbreak the council has adopted a 7-stage approach.

Stage 1: Service prioritisation	Those that need to be fully restored Those that need to be partially restored Those that will not be provided for now Those that might need to be changed or enhanced to respond to COVID or to support longer-term objectives
Stage 2: Determine safe working practices	For services that will be fully or partially restored, what safe working practices will be required to ensure the safety of staff, partners and the public. This will be based on government guidelines.
Stage 3: Undertake a service and community impact assessment on the revised service provision	In order to assess and minimise differential impact on different sections of the community and partners, for new models of service provision assess the impact of the proposal / arrangements
Stage 4: Plan for how you will cease or reduce restored services if required	It may become necessary to stop or reduce services if there is an increased spread of infection (a local outbreak)
Stage 5: HR Requirement	The expectation remains that people should work from home if they can, and the need to maintain safe working practices in the workplace if they cannot.
Stage 6: Property, Facilities and IT	Assess impacts and new requirements.
Stage 7: Consideration of future changes	This process may need to be repeated to respond to changes as we move through the Government Recovery Plan. Taking into consideration the changes that are likely to happen at each step, services should consider when they will need to review the service delivery.

Planning for the transitional horizon

3.5 Planning for the transitional horizon is essential, this is the period we are entering now when lockdown has eased and services are being reopened but the risk of a further outbreak remains high. Our focus here will be to support the national approach to managing and preventing infection, including local outbreak plans and test and trace. Within the council we are undertaking scenario planning to ensure our services are ready and prepared if a further local or national outbreak occurs, include workplace outbreaks and geographic outbreaks. All council services will be expected to plan for the impact of a local outbreak and be ready to 'lockdown' again.

For planning purposes, we are using the following four scenarios to test and assure our preparedness. This work is being led by the joint OCC and CDC emergency planning team.

- 1) Outbreak in a specific site or work location, e.g. school, care home, council office
- 2) Outbreak in a local geographic location, e.g. market town, village or ward area.
- 3) Outbreak affecting a specific community e.g. faith group, ethnic minority group, college and university students etc.
- 4) Wider outbreak affecting the county/region or a further national outbreak.

- 3.6 As the national decline in new cases of Coronavirus infection and COVID-19 associated deaths continues, local authorities are being asked to support national plans to reduce the spread of infection and respond to 'local outbreaks'. The Director of Public Health (DPH) has a duty to prepare for and lead the local authority's response to threats to the public's health as part of this national approach.
- 3.7 The Government is developing a national Test and Trace service, which will form a central part of the national COVID-19 recovery strategy. To successfully achieve this, local planning and response will be an essential part of the Test and Trace service and councils have a central role to play in the identification and management of infection. Local government will build on existing health protection plans to put in place measures to identify and contain outbreaks and protect the public's health. The local Director of Public Health will be responsible for defining these measures and producing plans, working through the Oxfordshire COVID-19 Health Protection Board. The Board will be responsible for strategic oversight of health protection regarding COVID-19 in Oxfordshire, including prevention, surveillance, planning and response, to ensure they meet the needs of the population.
- 3.8 The Board will support the local delivery of the national strategy to control the COVID-19 reproduction number (R). Its focus will be reducing the spread of infection and in doing so help to return life to as normal as possible, for as many people as possible, in a way that is safe, protects our health and care systems and releases our economy. CDC will be represented on this board by its Director of Customer Services.
- 3.9 The delivery of the strategic aims of the Health Protection Board will be tasked to a multi-agency operational team who will coordinate the local outbreak plan development, workforce and resources requirement in the ongoing monitoring of local infection and mobilising the planned response to COVID-19 in Oxfordshire.

Planning for the post-Covid or long-term horizon

- 3.10 The long-term impacts of the pandemic are not yet known or understood in full. There will be health (both physical and mental) impacts, particularly affecting those who are most vulnerable. The inevitable economic impacts of the lock down will impact on local business, our town centres, rural enterprises and workers across the county and district. We do not yet know the impacts on young people in terms of educational attainment and wellbeing nor the wider social and cultural consequences of a post-pandemic society.
- 3.11 Appendix 1 sets out a strategy and series of thematic groups that have been formed to explore the long-term policy consequences of COVID-19 covering economic, social, health, community and organisational impacts. These groups will undertake the necessary research and impact analysis to form solutions that will be reflected in new corporate and service delivery plans. Necessarily these longer-term plans and proposals will need to feed into the budget setting process in future years.

- 3.12 This work is essential, and it will require CDC to review its long-term strategic plans and priorities as well as the financial impacts of the pandemic. The work will include how CDC works in partnership, its models of service delivery, how it uses its buildings and the type of services it delivers. This work will also take into account lessons from our response to the pandemic, particularly activities such as remote and digital service delivery and how frontline staff are supported to deliver services in a safe way. The use of buildings and assets will be considered following our experiences with lockdown and social distancing.

The financial impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic

- 3.13 As reported to the Executive in May 2020, the estimated financial impact arising from COVID-19 in 2020/21 is £4.7m. The financial impact is reflected in additional costs, loss of income and expected slippage in the delivery of savings.
- 3.14 Estimates are being reviewed regularly based on the latest information available and as there is a greater understanding of the impact of recovery planning. The estimate of £4.7m was based on the government assumption that lockdown continues to the end of June 2020 with a phased return to normal operations. However, the position is now known to be more nuanced. For example, it is now anticipated that in relation to our commercial properties, rent due in Quarter 2 of 2020/21 may be more difficult to collect than Quarter 1 due to the sustained impact on businesses particularly for the 'restaurant and hospitality' sectors. This will have a further impact on the lost income position.
- 3.15 To date, funding of almost £1.6m has been received towards the costs and lost income, leaving a shortfall in grant funding of £3.1m for the year. Very real concerns have been expressed across the sector that the funding provided so far is nowhere near enough to enable local authorities to sustain their response to the pandemic. And whilst the Government has "made a commitment to support all authorities with the additional cost pressures from the extra work" and acknowledged the need to support councils for the 'irrecoverable losses in income', we wait to hear when further funding will be provided, and whether this will be sufficient to meet the council's needs.
- 3.16 These further funding commitments are required urgently; if they are not forthcoming, the Council will need to take a view on how it will meet any funding shortfall that remains for 2020/21.
- 3.17 There is also an anticipated impact into 2021/22 due to reduced income from council tax and business rates as well as a potential on-going increase in demand relating to homelessness and the ongoing impact of any savings planned for 2020/21 which are not delivered.
- 3.18 Scenarios are being modelled which will help inform the position for 2020/21 and shape early assumptions for 2021/22. As a consequence of this, it is recommended that officers prepare financial and transformational plans which align with the organisation's policy response to COVID and its impacts, including refreshing the medium-term financial plan and savings targets.
- 3.19 In addition to the costs and funding set out above, on 24 May 2020, the Government announced a £50 million fund for councils to prepare for the safe

reopening of high streets and other retail spaces. This new money is to be used to support measures so businesses can re-open quickly. It will also support a range of practical safety measures including new signs, street markings and temporary barriers. The funding comes from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) allocated to councils on a per capita basis. The Council has received £133,843 from the fund.

- 3.20 Longer term measures to end rough sleeping were also announced in late May, with a commitment from Government for an additional 6,000 supported homes to provide long-term, safe homes for vulnerable rough sleepers currently housed in emergency accommodation during the pandemic. Funding of £433m has been committed, comprising the £381 million announced for rough sleeping services at Budget 2020 and an additional £52 million. Details of how the funding will be allocated have not yet been announced.

4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1 This report sets out an overarching approach for the Cherwell District Council to shape and coordinate its approach to immediate, transitional and long-term recovery. The council is recommended to continue to work within the Thames Valley resilience forum framework (TVLRF) and contribute to the Oxfordshire response to COVID-19 as part of the Local Health Protection Board. Appendix 4 sets out the emergency response, council recovery and Oxfordshire Health Protection Board governance structures to ensure transparency and assurance.
- 4.2 The council recognises that the pandemic will have far reaching consequences in terms of social, economic, health and community impacts and will seek to develop new policy and service delivery arrangements in response. The strategy by which it will do this is set out at appendix 1.
- 4.3 The council's staff are essential to the successful delivery of services and as part of recovery and renewal relevant support and organisational development will need to be undertaken. Likewise, the financial impacts of the pandemic are significant, and the council will need to respond with budgetary plans and proposals including a new medium-term financial plan.
- 4.4 The council will seek to engage with partners, communities and stakeholders as part of its response, and the report sets out the use of customer and community engagement as well as impact assessment as part of the process.
- 4.5 Finally the report provides an overview of the current operational status at appendix 3 and proposes a policy at appendix 2 with regards to how the council's buildings will be opened.

5.0 Consultation

- 5.1 Impact analysis, stakeholder and community consultation will be required if the council seeks to change its long-term plans, priorities and budgets.

6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 6.1 No alternative options have been set out. Recovery, service restart and renewal are essential to the long-term sustainability and wellbeing of the district, failure to plan effectively will likely increase the risk faced by the Council to its long-term sustainability and operational effectiveness.

7.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 The financial implications of the pandemic are set out in this report. The recommendations themselves have no immediate financial impact and proposals resulting from recovery planning will be costed and considered as part of the budget setting process for 2021/22. All budget proposals will be subject to the usual scrutiny and democratic process.

Comments checked by:

Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance and S151 Officer, lorna.baxter@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Legal Implications

- 7.2 There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report. As budget and service delivery proposals are formed consultation and impact assessment will be undertaken.

Comments checked by:

Steve Jorden, Corporate Director – Commercial Development, Assets and Investment and acting Monitoring Officer, steve.jorden@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Risk

- 7.3 A proactive approach to planning for the short, medium and long-term impacts of the pandemic is essential to securing a sustainable and effective operational recovery. Failure to plan presents the most significant risk to the organisation and the proposals set out in this report seek to mitigate that risk. Appendix 5 presents a summary of the current risk register.

Comments checked by:

Louise Tustian, Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes, louise.tustian@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Equalities, Inclusion and Diversity

- 7.4 The council recognises that the Coronavirus pandemic has had different impacts on the communities of Cherwell. Our policy and service developments will be subject to consultation with diverse groups, including impact assessment and a focus on protected characteristics and those who are at greater risk of vulnerability in the face of COVID-19.

Comments checked by:

Susannah Wintersgill, Director Strategy, Insight and Communications
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8.0 Decision Information

Key Decision

Financial Threshold Met: No

Community Impact Threshold Met: No

Wards Affected

All

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

Links to all council priorities and service budgets.

Lead Councillor

Councillor Barry Wood, Leader.

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
1	Restart, Recover, Renew – A strategy for post Covid recovery.
2	Re-opening of council buildings (policy)
3	Operational Status Update
4	Response and Recovery Governance and Structure Charts
5	Summary of risk register
Background Papers	
None	
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