

Title of report: Covid 19 Recovery Plan

Meeting: Cabinet

Meeting date: Thursday 24 June 2021

Report by: Chief Executive Officer

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant having regard to: the strategic nature of the decision; and / or whether the outcome will have an impact, for better or worse, on the amenity of the community or quality of service provided by the authority to a significant number of people living or working in the locality (two or more wards) affected.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To approve the Covid 19 Recovery Plan 2021/22 delivering the immediate actions required to enable short term economic, community wellbeing and organisational recovery. The plan is centred on three key areas; Economic, Community Wellbeing and Organisational recovery.

Work will be based on the lessons we've learned, what our residents and businesses tell us is important and our understanding of what our county needs for a successful and sustainable future; we must make our recovery from Covid-19 a green recovery.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) The Covid 19 Recovery Plan 2021/22 is approved, implementing up to £6.144m of Covid 19 funding to deliver the immediate actions required to enable short term economic, community wellbeing and organisational recovery.**

- b) The Director of Economy and Place, Director Adults and Communities, Director Children and Families and Director of Public Health be authorised to take all operational decisions to implement recommendation including, but not limited to, the procurement and commissioning of the identified projects (as set out in the detailed action plan in appendix A).**

Alternative options

1. Do nothing – The council could decide not to establish a Covid 19 Recovery Plan. There is a risk that the immediate short terms actions required to stem increasing unemployment, support businesses to recover as soon as possible, and the provision of wellbeing support and advice to those that need it most will not be implemented, furthering the impacts of Covid 19 and extending the recovery period. There is also a risk that remaining Covid 19 government funding will be lost if not committed and spent in 2021/22, reducing the council's ability to deliver the critical services required to support recovery.

Key considerations

2. The global Covid 19 pandemic and the resulting measures taken to reduce the spread of the virus have had an unprecedented impact on the national and local economy and on people's wellbeing and mental (as well as physical) health. Nationally the magnitude of the recession caused by the pandemic is unprecedented, GDP declined by 9.8% in 2020 the steepest drop since records began in 1948. The Office of National Statistics Opinions and Lifestyle survey indicates that nationally around one in five (21%) adults experienced depressive symptoms in early 2021, more than double the rate before the pandemic (10%). Across the country alcohol related deaths have increased by 20% in 2020 compared to 2019.
3. Within Herefordshire large parts of our economy have been required to close for the majority of the last 12 months such as hospitality, tourism, culture, leisure and non-essential retail. There has been a significant onward impact on the supply chain to these sectors. Agriculture, manufacturing and construction sectors have also faced significant challenges in adjusting to different working environments, supply chain disruption and changing customer needs. The county has seen significant increases in those claiming unemployment benefits (123% compared to March 2020), and thousands of local people furloughed (9,900 as of end of March 2021) through the Job Retention Scheme.
4. There has been significant impact on children and young people with education and opportunities being severely disrupted over the past year. Children have missed out on half an academic year of face-to-face teaching, and opportunities for socialising and development, for example for younger children, have been severely impacted.
5. Health and wellbeing have been affected by virus itself but also due to lack of access to (or desire to access) formal and informal services and activities meaning that there is now both previously unmet need and additional need from the last year. The

Herefordshire Community Wellbeing Survey 2021 found 28% of people reported high levels of anxiety, 32% experienced drop in household income, 33% doing less exercise, and 30% sleeping less well. Covid 19 has revealed and exacerbated the inequalities in our society, and in Herefordshire, the Wellbeing Survey found wellbeing is lowest in those living in the most deprived areas. There is therefore an opportunity, as we come out of lock-down, to ensure that we address these needs and help individuals, families and communities to recover, importantly working to improve the lives of those most affected fastest.

6. The Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector has provided exceptional support across the county during the pandemic and many organisations have experienced an increase in demand and higher complexity in the support needed. Following a survey completed last year with the sector 43% of organisations have seen an increase in demand for the service and 61% require support to access income generation opportunities and have funding requirements. Working in partnership with the VCSE and our communities will be vital to improve the wellbeing of our population.
7. The council has already urgently established a wide range of activity to support local businesses and help save local jobs. For example, so far we have delivered almost 20,000 grants totalling over £100m of support to local businesses, and secured over £6.5m of external funding for a wide range of activities such as establishing safe environments for people to return to the high street/ town centres, promoting our tourism offer, and offering work experience placements to 16 to 24 year olds in receipt of universal credit. Since March 2020 Talk Community has received 3,500 requests for support, and has co-ordinated over 300 volunteers in ensuring those isolating received food, medication and access to financial aid where required. Twenty Talk Community hubs have launched over the first four months of 2021 which provide information, advice and signposting to residents within communities and a network of volunteers to connect residents into their communities.
8. We have worked hard since the start of the pandemic to prevent and reduce spread of infection and protect those most vulnerable in our society. This has included focused prevention work with high risk settings, establishing a COVID-19 health protection function (Outbreak Control Hub) as well as the BRAVE work to protect some of the most vulnerable in our society. This work, together with our role in supporting and ensuring vaccination of our population, will remain vital and ongoing during the coming year.
9. The council's focus now shifts towards the soonest possible recovery of the local economy and communities. Over the coming months the true impact of the pandemic will become better known, trade will start to recover but publically funded grants, business rate holidays, and the job retention scheme will also come to an end. The Covid 19 Recovery Plan (the "Recovery Plan") (Appendix A) focuses on the immediate impactful actions we need to take in the short term.
10. The following are the council's objectives for economic, community wellbeing and organisational recovery;

- To rapidly implement the Recovery Plan in 2021/22 delivering the immediate action required to enable short term economic and wellbeing recovery.
- To accelerate delivery of actions in the council's Delivery Plan in 2021/22 that will support the soonest possible recovery.
- To launch in 2021/22 a Herefordshire Recovery & Investment Fund (subject to a separate cabinet decision) which will support key sectors through specialist land, buildings and facilities, enabling adjustments within sectors to respond to new opportunities such as green technology and transport, and adaptations in working patterns.
- By the end of 2021/22 establish a long term economic vision (2050) and strategy, building on our local strengths and opportunities to create a greener, fairer economy for all revitalising our market towns, city and wider rural county.
- To build and accelerate projects that seek to improve the overall physical and mental wellbeing across all ages of the Herefordshire population, and improve the lives of those most affected fastest.
- Develop a complete working experience for council staff that delivers a new 'Hybrid Working Model' and creates a modern, vibrant workplace where creativity and collaboration is actively encouraged

11. The Recovery Plan's priorities will be to establish *Safe and Welcoming Places, support Business Viability and Resilience, Support Employment, and Support Wellbeing.*

Community impact

12. As identified above, Covid 19 has had a very severe impact on local communities in terms of the impact on people's health and wellbeing, loss of income, loss of jobs, long periods of anxiety and isolation. Across the country alcohol related deaths have increased by 20% in 2020 compared to 2019. Children have missed out on half an academic year of face-to-face teaching and very young children are at risk of language and social delays.
13. The Recovery Plan sets out a range of immediate and impactful actions to support local communities to recover. Including access to health and wellbeing support and advice, assistance to find new employment opportunities through re-skilling and re-training, and incentives for people to safely re-engage with their communities through returning to active work, leisure and social lives.
14. In November 2020, the council published their [Delivery Plan](#) for the period up to April 2022. The projects and deliverables set out in the Delivery Plan 2020/22 will continue however this plan aims to accelerate activity to support recovery, such as;

- EC0.3: Provide support to businesses to enable the soonest possible recovery of the local economy from the impacts of COVID-19.
- EC2.4: Continue to support development of the Hereford Enterprise Zone, including completion & successful operation of the Shell Store business incubation centre and the Midlands Centre for Cyber Security, to deliver new high-skill job opportunities.
- EC5.1: Work with private sector partners to support the growth of the tourism industry across Herefordshire building on our strengths of outdoor activities, heritage & culture; and support the development of a destination business improvement district.
- CO4.3: Develop Right Support, Right Time for Families through our Talk Community approach and building on strengths within local communities.
- CO4 - Protect and improve the lives of vulnerable people.
- CO6 - Support communities to help each other through a network of community hubs.

Environmental Impact

15. The council is committed to building back better, creating a greener, fairer society for all. A number of the activities in the Recovery Plan support this ambition, such as proposals to incentivise transport modal shift to public transport, car pools and cycling as people return to travelling to and around the county. Encouraging people to shop locally/ buy locally supporting local businesses and employment, and reducing importing of goods in to the country/ county.
16. A key focus of the plan is encouraging 'staycation' tourism visits to the county to enable the soonest possible recovery of the visitor economy, instead of people flying to overseas destinations. Support for re-skilling/ re-training and business diversification will include opportunities for people to take advantage of new fast growing market opportunities in green technology and adaptation (such as for example retrofit).

Equality duty

17. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

18. The Recovery Plan aims to support all those who have been impacted through Covid 19. The council recognises that the pandemic has exacerbated the inequalities in our society, and in Herefordshire, the Wellbeing Survey 2021 found wellbeing is lowest in those living in the most deprived areas. There is an opportunity as the county comes out of lock-down to ensure that the council addresses these needs and help individuals, families and communities to recover, importantly working to improve the lives of those most affected fastest. The range of immediate and impactful actions identified in the Recovery Plan will seek to quickly provide support to those individuals and communities that need it the most. Equality Impact Assessments will be completed for each strand of recovery activity.

Resource implications

19. Up to £6.144m of Covid 19 grant funding will support the implementation of activities identified in the Recovery Plan. Of which £4m is from funding provided by government to support the Covid 19 response set aside in an ear marked reserve and £2m from the Covid 19 Outbreak Management Funds grant allocation from the Department of Health and Social Care.
20. Detailed individual proposals will be brought forward against the activities identified in the plan for delegated operational approval by the Director for Economy and Place, Director Adults and Communities, Director Children and Families, Director Public Health following consultation with the Section 151 Officer. The detailed proposals will identify the additional people capacity required (and how this will be met) and any IT implications in taking forward each of the proposed activities. Where services are externally procured, they will be procured in accordance with the council's contract procedure rules.

Revenue or Capital cost of project (indicate R or C)	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Future Years	Total
Recovery Plan Implementation (R)	£0	£0	£6,144,000	£0	£6,144,000
TOTAL	£0	£0	£6,144,000	£0	£6,144,000

Funding streams (indicate whether base budget / external / grant / capital borrowing)	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Future Years	Total
Covid 19 Recovery Funding	£0	£0	£4,144,000	£0	£4,144,000
Covid 19 Outbreak Management Funds	£0	£0	£2,000,000	£0	£2,000,000

TOTAL	£0	£0	£6,144,000	£0	£6,144,000
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Revenue budget implications	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Future Years	Total
Recovery Plan Implementation (R)	£0	£0	£6,144,000	£0	£6,144,000
TOTAL	£0	£0	£6,144,000	£0	£6,144,000

Legal implications

21. The council is able to accept the grant funding provided by government to support the Covid 19 response and use the Covid 19 Outbreak Management Funds in accordance with the general power of competence under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 which allows the council to do anything that an individual can do.
22. The majority of the grant funding has been provided under s31 of the Local Government Act 2003 to support the council in meeting the expenditure incurred or to be incurred in relation to the mitigation against and management of COVID-19. The s31 determinations for the emergency funding (COVID 19 Recovery Funding), which the council received in four tranches were not published and therefore there appear to be no explicit conditions attached to this funding. The COVID 19 Outbreak Management Fund allocations are only subject to conditions that are applicable to two tier areas and these are therefore not relevant to the council.
23. The funding has to be used for the purposes as set out in Recovery Plan which is appended to this report by 31 March 2022.

Risk management

24. The following are risks related to the delivery of the Recovery Plan;

<i>Risk / opportunity</i>	<i>Mitigation</i>
Proposed project activities identified within the delivery plan cannot be delivered to budget (end of March 2022) or budget.	Detailed proposals will be developed for each activity, detailing approach to delivery, key milestones, risks, how complies with state aid, and capacity requirements prior to implimenting. Identified Senior Responsible Officer and Project Managers will be responsible for overseeing delivery within available timescales and budget.
Demand for some activities may exceed available budget/ capacity	The business case for each activity will set out how the available funds will be allocated and managed within the available budget.
Some lockdown restrictions may extend beyond 21 June 2021, or there could be further local restrictions should circumstances change (such as Covid 19 variants).	In the event of extended or new lockdown restrictions each activity will be reviewed to determine if it should continue, be paused or discontinued depending on circumstances at the time.
COVID-19 pandemic has future waves requiring funding from COMF to reduce transmission and outbreaks.	Funding will be allocated through the year to enable, as far as possible, a view to divert funding to direct outbreak prevention and management if required.
There is a risk that the proposed activities aren't delivered by the end of March 2022	Detailed project proposals will detail how each scheme will be delivered and related risks. A project board will oversee and manage implementation, escalating any delivery issues to relevant Director and Management Board.

Consultees

25. Political Groups have been consulted – no comments have been received

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Covid 19 Recovery Plan

Background papers

None