

Decision To give Delegated Authority to the Section 151 officer in consultation with the appropriate director to move funding between the approved schemes within the agreed COVID Recovery plan

Decision maker: Cabinet member finance, corporate services and planning

Decision date: 23 February 2022

Report by: Project Manager

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 10 (General Exception) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

Following the implementation of a number of projects within the schemes agreed in the original [Covid recovery plan](#) approved by cabinet on 24 June 2021, it has become apparent that some of the schemes are going to have underspend within the initial allocated budget and some have been oversubscribed. To ensure that all underspend can be fully maximised within the given timeframes to support economic recovery and the community wellbeing of residents as part of Covid Recovery it is requested that delegated authority be given to the Section 151 officer following consultation with the appropriate director to move the allocated funding between the approved schemes.

Recommendation

That delegated authority be given to the Section 151 officer, following consultation with the appropriate director, to reallocate funding between agreed schemes within the Covid Recovery Plan to maximise the £6.144m budget.

Alternative options

1. Do nothing - If delegated authority is not granted then all decisions will need to follow the key cabinet member decision making process which would cause delays in reallocating any underspend. A key risk associated with this is that funding would not be reallocated by 31 March 2022 meaning significant underspend in the overall Covid Recovery Plan budget.

Key considerations

2. Following the approval of the [Covid Recovery plan](#) by Cabinet on 24 June 2021 a number of projects have been progressed within the agreed schemes outlined in Appendix 1.
3. It has become apparent that some of the schemes are going to have underspend within the initial allocated budget and some have been oversubscribed. To ensure that all underspend can be fully maximised within the given timeframes some flexibility to move funding allocations between schemes is required.
4. The current delegated authority does not give this flexibility meaning that the key member decision process would need to be completed for all change requests. This will cause delays with the risk that the Covid Recovery funding of £6.144m will not all be allocated by 31 March 2022 leaving significant underspend in the budget.

Community impact

5. 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.
6. The original COVID 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 retraining, and incentives for people to safely re-engage with their communities through returning to active work, leisure and social lives.
7. In November 2020, the council published their [Delivery plan 2020-2022](#) for the period up to April 2022. The projects and deliverables set out in the Delivery plan will continue however this plan aims to increase 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 and 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

8. The council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the people of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.
9. The further development of these schemes will look to minimise any adverse environmental impact and will actively seek opportunities to improve and enhance environmental performance.

Equality duty

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.
10. The Covid 19 Recovery Plan aims to support all those who have been impacted through Covid. 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 Covid 19 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

11. Detailed individual proposals have been brought forward for delegated operational approval by the appropriate director and the Section 151 Officer. The recommendation to give delegated authority to the section 151 officer following consultation with the appropriate director to move any underspend between schemes will reduce the additional resource needed to reallocate this funding. Where services are externally procured, they will be procured in accordance with the council's contract procedure rules.
12. There are no cost implications for this decision as this is to give flexibility to reallocate the funding that has already been agreed as part of the original decision.

Legal implications

13. There are no legal implications arising from this report as there are no changes to the overall budget allocation and no new projects are being introduced into the COVID Recovery Plan. The original purpose of the funding remains the same and there is no restrictions set out in the s31 Agreement providing the funding which prohibits reallocation of funds between schemes.

Risk management

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Demand for some activities may exceed available budget/ capacity	The business case for each activity has set out how the available funds will be allocated and managed within the available budget.
Some lockdown restrictions may be re-introduced, or there could be further local restrictions should circumstances change (such as further Covid 19 variants).	In the event of 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 Covid Outbreak Management Fund 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	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. As this additional funding is being used to support existing schemes this risk is also reduced.

Consultees

14. A political consultation was undertaken with all members via email due to the timeframes around this decision. One comment was received back which confirmed support for the recommended decision.

Appendices

None

Background papers

None identified

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Governance	Sarah Buffrey, Democratic Services Officer	Date 11/02/2022
Finance	Louise Devlin	Date 08/02/2022
Legal	Alice McAlpine	Date 14/02/2022
Communications	Luenne featherstone	Date 09/02/2022
Equality Duty	Carol Trachonitis	Date 09/02/2022
Procurement	Mark Cage	Date 09/02/2022
Risk	Kevin Lloyd	Date 14/02/2022

Approved by Andrew Lovegrove Section 151 officer Date 14/02/2022