

18 August 2020

Report of	Assistant Director Place and Client Services	Author	Mandy Jones ☎ 282501
Title	Pre-Scrutiny of the Council Recovery Programme (Covid-19)		
Wards affected	All		

## 1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report details the progress made to date on the development of the Council's Covid-19 Recovery programme, developed in response to the Coronavirus pandemic.

In particular, it outlines:

- Progress made to date in the development of the Recovery programme since the Cabinet report of 3 June 2020 entitled 'Council Recovery Programme (Covid-19)' which set out the emerging framework and the approach taken by the Council, and with partners, to facilitate recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic.
- A summary review of the 'short-term' actions taken between the end of April and July 2020, building on those actions outlined in the two Cabinet reports of 3 June 2020: 'The Council response to Coronavirus (COVID-19)' which outlines work undertaken in response to the crisis and the 'Council Recovery programme (Covid-19)' report as referred to in the point above.
- The draft Recovery Action Plan (Appendix A) which is divided into the four 'cell' areas of Economy, Community, Customer and Council and contains the objectives and areas of activity associated with recovery for each cell area, focussing on the 'medium term' (between July 2020 and April 2021) and beyond.

1.2 Cross cutting themes of Housing, Finance, Climate Change and Sustainability and commerciality (represented through work with the Council's companies) are facilitated by the programme structure; activity relating to the priorities in these areas are woven through the fabric of the Recovery plan.

1.3 Two separate reports are being brought to this Scrutiny panel meeting for review: (Amphora Recovery Programme (Covid-19) and Colchester Borough Homes (CBH) Recovery Programme (Covid-19). The approach to recovery from Covid-19 detailed by Colchester Commercial Holdings Ltd (and the 'Amphora' companies) and CBH is aligned with the strategic direction and principles of the Council's recovery programme, the objectives contained within the Recovery plan and the budget strategy developed to respond to the considerable financial pressures caused by the Coronavirus pandemic.

1.4. Cabinet approved the recommendations in the report on the Council's Recovery Programme of 3 June 2020, specifically: that the approach to the Recovery programme outlined in 1.1 above and summarised further in 4.1 to 4.3 below are adopted and that further work to prioritise areas of activity and emerging projects would be undertaken with portfolio holders, balancing these with the significant financial pressures outlined in a separate report to the same Cabinet meeting (see Cabinet report of Assistant Director

– Corporate and Improvement Services: Covid-19 budget changes 2020/21 and budget strategy 2021/22). The work outlined in this report and detailed in Appendix A is the initial outcome of that process.

## **2. Action Required**

- 2.1 To pre-scrutinise the progress made to date on the Council's Recovery programme and plan as outlined in this report (and at Appendix A) prior to the report being brought to Cabinet for approval on 2 September 2020.

## **3. Reason for Scrutiny**

- 3.1 To ensure the Council's approach to recovery from Coronavirus as represented by the development of the Recovery programme summarised in this report (and detailed further in the report to Cabinet of 3 June 2020) is sound.
- 3.2 To ensure the objectives and activity outlined in the Recovery plan itself are also sound, acknowledging that the plan needs to be flexible and evolve in response to future uncertainties in the economy and society as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **4. Background Information**

### Building on the Recovery Programme principles and framework

- 4.1 The principles being used to guide the development of the Council's Recovery Plan are outlined as good practice by the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU). They include the need to 'build back better' by increasing resilience in the economy, the consideration of innovative and transformational delivery models, developing key role players and shared ownership and partnerships and aligning these across funding streams and to prioritise activity according to these principles.
- 4.2 The Cabinet report outlined the framework for the recovery programme as a four 'cell' model. To briefly recap the cells are Economy, Community, Council and Customer. Each cell area is owned by an Assistant Director with sponsorship by Executive Management Team. Governance, development and oversight is directed by portfolio holders and major decisions are brought to Cabinet. Two diagrams which illustrate the programme framework are included at Appendix B.
- 4.3 A cross party 'Leadership Assembly' made up of all-party Group Leaders meets regularly to provide policy input, raise awareness and communicate the development and progress of the Recovery programme within political groups and to all Members. It also provides direction for the programme, supporting officers where appropriate and using learning from the current crisis to contribute to the future direction of key community and delivery partnerships.
- 4.4 As outlined in the report to Cabinet, the effects of Covid-19 have been far reaching and will continue to have a profound impact on our economy and communities into the future. The rate of change has been unprecedented and is continuing. Set against this uncertainty, predictions for how the Coronavirus pandemic will continue to impact on all aspects of people's lives and detailed predictions for the future of our economy and communities are wide and varied.
- 4.5 In order to respond to this uncertainty, we have two strategies. Firstly, to ensure we are continually scanning for, and receptive to analysis of the future effects of Covid-19 on the

national and local economy and our communities. Secondly, we need to ensure that the plan is agile and able to respond to negative effects as they arise and, conversely, to harness opportunities as a result of the pandemic or created through national policy.

- 4.6 The Recovery plan is intelligence and insight driven. The business intelligence workstream, includes the development of a dashboard of national and economic indicators and utilises intelligence from a variety of sources (including South East area Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) and the Office for National Statistics) to influence activity in the Economy cell. Local insight is also gathered and analysed: a recent survey was sent to over 2,500 businesses (with a 15% response rate) and monitoring statistics and engagement with business networks and partners such as Colchester Business Enterprise Agency (Colbea) and Our Colchester Business Improvement District (BID) has helped target our activity. In addition, research commissioned by the Council with North East Essex Health and Well Being Alliance (NEE HWB Alliance) examined the role community assets play in enabling wellbeing and is being used to inform the Community Cell activity, with partners such as One Colchester Strategic Partnership and the NEE HWB Alliance. The report is published here: <https://aru.ac.uk/research/ageing>
- 4.7 The flexibility of the plan is facilitated by an agile project management methodology and the plan is updated monthly. The 'cell' framework approach works across council services and embeds a set of 'cross cutting' themes into the plan, to ensure priorities such as sustainability and climate change are woven through to produce a plan that delivers on our priorities, rather than focussing on service delivery alone.

#### The Recovery plan and 'cells'

- 4.8 The Cabinet report of 3 June outlined our objectives for each cell area and a set of emerging areas of activity and potential actions. Considerable work has been undertaken since the June 2020 Cabinet report to respond to the current crisis in the short term to aid future recovery and to develop and prioritise actions and associated timescales to support recovery in the medium term (July 2020 to April 2021). Examples of the work undertaken in the short term are outlined at 4.12 and examples of future actions from the Recovery Plan (Appendix A) are outlined at 4.14.
- 4.9 Each cell area by its nature needs a varying approach to their plan. Partnerships work plays a key part in both the Economy and Community cells, with ownership for delivery often led jointly across systems and with other public and private sector organisations. In addition, some objectives are linked to longer term outcomes, rather than measurable short-term wins. This is especially true for the Communities cell where we are often jointly enabling work that is being delivered by our partners. One Colchester and the North East Essex Health Alliance are key partnerships driving the ambition and agreed actions, each organisation has its own recovery plan and priorities and our aim is to ensure these are joined up, understood and supported by partners to build and collaborate, improving outcomes where relevant.
- 4.10 For the Council and Customer cells the work is more focussed on how the Council recovers as an organisation and delivers services that help our residents recover from Coronavirus. For this reason, actions are likely to be more defined and measurable.
- 4.11 The approach to communication and engagement is for each cell owner (Assistant Director) to work proactively to identify opportunities to engage and communicate, ensuring these are built into areas of activity or project outlined in the plan. Most areas of activity will need their own engagement plan, for instance, work with the 'We are

Colchester' partnership to develop our Town Deal (bid for up to £25m from Government – see items 4.12 and 4.14 Economy below) is developing an extensive programme of engagement work to include partners, stakeholders and communities in the development of the Town Investment Plan.

- 4.12 Engagement will consider the needs and inequalities experienced by particular groups in society such as Black Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities and young people, with activity targeted to facilitate greater inclusion. An example of using insight and engagement is our involvement in the Essex Police Independent Advisory Group (IAG) which uses local insight to build the needs, wants and assets of groups who are under-represented in decision making processes. This insight and engagement with under-represented groups is used to shape services and to inform the Recovery Plan.

#### Progress on short term actions in each cell area (May to July 2020)

- 4.13 Below are some examples of progress in the short term for each cell area:

##### **Economy**

- **Extensive work with partners to re-open high streets (including work with the Business Improvement District's Town Centre Task Force)** have enabled social distancing and confidence for visitors when visiting town centres.
- **The £25M Town Deal process has re-started** – 'We Are Colchester' Board ratified a decision for our Town Investment Plan to be submitted to government in October 2020 and Recovery planning to be built into the process (with £1M available to us for earlier opportunities).
- **A Business Impact Survey** has been distributed and analysed and contributes to activity outlined.
- Continued sharing and promotion of **climate/sustainability good practice** - for example, working with ECC to facilitate implementation of Safer, Greener, Healthier routes in the Town Centre.
- Promoting emphasis on **travel planning and 'working differently' opportunities** **LFFN Gigabit Broadband** network High Street works - completed July 2020.
- Working with the Our Colchester Business Improvement District (BID) to encourage people to buy locally.
- Council procurement process reviewed to **increase local opportunities** and attract local suppliers and contractors.
- Colchester's four Arts / Museum based National Portfolio Organisations supported in **stimulating and relaunching key local arts and cultural sector businesses** and assets within the new guidelines - ongoing.
- **Pavement repairs/improvements** work in Colchester High Street has started.
- Development of specific schemes that **improve public realm in town centre: Mercury and St Nicholas Square**. Builds on previously completed (HAT projects) work.

##### **Community**

- **Digital Access** Teams project extension funding paper has been submitted to the Alliance for a decision
- **Track and Trace** scenario exercise has taken place with County partners. Process & procedures are in place
- All useful and relevant information for potential **volunteers** has been collated and now held in one central place at Volunteer Essex.

##### **Council**

- A first full cycle of **public Council Decision Making meetings** have been successfully delivered with 1877 views of our meetings on the Council YouTube channel
- All services are on track to have **resumed by the end of July 2020** following Covid risk assessments being carried out on a service by service basis
- Rowan House and the Town Hall are being utilised with appropriate Covid-19 controls in place
- **Lobbying of central government** to hold them to their word that all Covid-19 cost/budget impacts would be met has continued
- The **MTFF has been revised** to take account of the emerging position but there is still a considerable budget gap
- The **New Strategic Priorities** previously adopted by Council **have been reviewed** and found to be still be appropriate.
- The thematic approach to the budget strategy is encouraging a reimagination of services

## Customer

- **Welfare Benefits and Discretionary Funds services have improved** due to new way of interacting and meeting with residents. Improved attendance rates compared during and post covid19 months. Communications include bi-weekly infographic updates, which signposts to the website
- the **Business Rates team** continue to distribute grants and the Discretionary Business Grant was extended with relaxed eligibility criteria. All applicants have been contacted
- the **coronavirus website** is continuing to be reviewed and updated where appropriate
- we're **communicating how services are operation** (normal, disrupted or closed) via weekly social media updates, which signposts to the website
- A review of **local land charges** marketing is taking place to make the service more commercial through recovery
- Elections and Communications Team are discussing ways to contact residents for the **Annual Canvass** without the need for personal contact
- **Taxi driver and vehicle licensing processes are now in place and new driver applications will restart soon** after a complete overhaul of the processes and new ways of working in a virtual digital way are being designed and developed. This new way of working will reduce the amount of travel taxi drivers need to undertake, alongside reduced printing of documents, both of which contribute to reducing carbon emissions.

## Developed actions for the Medium term (and further into the future)

- 4.14 Appendix A is the Draft Recovery Plan with actions and activity for the 'medium term' and beyond. This document is a detailed account of the work that has been planned for between the present and April 2021 and beyond. Although much work has taken place since May 2020, the plan will continue to develop and be reprioritised and amended according to insight and intelligence, changes in government policy and the economy and society and Council and partner priorities.
- 4.15 Some examples from the Recovery Plan are listed below under the objectives for each cell area:

## Economy

### The Economy is rebuilt to be stronger in future

- **Town Deal** – finalising and submitting We Are Colchester's £25M bid and Town Investment Plan to Government in October 2020 – with a £1M early funding opportunity for key priority projects. An engagement plan is being developed with

an emphasis on participation by Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities and young people.

- **Partnership working** – continuing to work with key sectors and partners including One Colchester, The Ambassadors Group, North Essex Economic Strategy Group and We Are Colchester (Town Deal) to understand their own recovery planning and finding opportunities to address impacts jointly. This will include the sharing of best practice in ways to operate in an environmentally sustainable way post-Covid-19, for instance, supporting home working and promotion of sustainable travel options such as cycling and walking.
- **Funding of £20K for business support and advice to Colchester Business Enterprise Agency (Colbea)** in addition to the £9.5K funding provided this year to provide support through, email, telephone and fully funded 1:1 business advice sessions to local businesses to April 2021 to assist resilience and recovery.
- **Continuing focus on using intelligence** to target support, including the development of a dashboard of economic indicators.

### **Opportunities are developed to ensure the economy is greener and more inclusive**

- **Modern Methods of Construction (MMC)** – exploring opportunities to access MMC funding to unlock sites including housing sites.
- Working with ECC **to inform the development and implementation** of the next phase of their ‘**Safer Greener Healthier**’ transport initiative and feeding insight from local partners to promote a greater emphasis on **travel planning and working differently to minimise travel to and from work**. Helping organisations make these changes aims to lead to reduced congestion around the borough, reduced carbon emissions and improvements in air quality.
- **Rollout of the E-cargo bikes project** following the successful bid for cargo bikes with the Energy Savings Trust for £136k which has purchased 25 electric Cargo bikes and 5 trailers for use by 10 local businesses and community and public sector partners, promoting green modes of transport, helping small business recovery and contribute to the Council’s climate change and sustainability priorities. This will help to ensure the ongoing shift and increasing appetite for online deliveries amongst both consumers and businesses is made more environmentally friendly.

### **The programme stimulates the local economy and markets**

- Completing **construction and re-opening of Mercury Theatre**. In the construction of Mercury Theatre, work has gone in to ensuring the building is as sustainable as possible, with the installation of triple glazing, further solar panels and LED lighting amongst other improvements.
- **Delivery of the Colchester Northern Gateway Sports Park**, and infrastructure improvements, in order to open this regionally significant sports and leisure facility, promoting cycling and health.
- Continuing **delivery of Colchester Northern Gateway District Heat Network** to create an innovative renewable ground source energy supply.
- **Constructing ‘The Walk’ at Colchester Northern Gateway** for key pedestrian and cycle routes
- **Commencing 350 new homes** (30% affordable) at Colchester Northern Gateway
- Opening the
- Reviewing the whole ‘**social value**’ system of procurement to encourage local suppliers.

- Ongoing support for **arts and cultural sectors** through 'Creative Colchester' Board.
- **Develop a case for funding of new centre for digital and creative businesses in Queen St 'Queen St Grow on' facility.** If successful, this will enable these businesses to expand and up-scale. This will be built on the site of the former bus garage in Queen Street.

### **The Town Centre becomes a more vibrant, resilient and adaptable place for people to visit**

- Working to ensure research into future **digital working hubs** is undertaken
- **Pop up cycleways, secure Town Centre cycle parking and wider walking access** launched to ensure visitors can travel by sustainable modes of transport and feel safe and supported to do this.
- Opportunities to **improve the public realm** identified
- Opportunities to **promote areas where the natural environment is more prominent** in the urban streetscape identified to contribute to reducing air pollution and supporting biodiversity.
- See also work to **restart Town Deal** (above)

### **Community**

#### **Levels of inter-organisational collaboration and new working practices bought about by Covid 19 crisis are sustained**

- **'Lock it with Love'** campaign to be launched by One Colchester. Aimed at the public to show their appreciation for the NHS, loved ones. It is of a remembrance & commemorative nature as well attractive and something for people to look at.
- **Vulnerability & Shielding Alliance work** has been added into the Be Well domain work lead by CBC & TDC
- St Helena have increased their Rapid Response service capacity of Clinical Nurse Specialists aligned with other multi-disciplinary team members

#### **Communities are strengthened to mitigate economic disruption, reduce isolation and improve Health & Wellbeing**

- **Firstsite** are working with the Alliance on a photography project to celebrate NHS workers
- Joint working by CBC & C360 to **map local green prescribing opportunities** for well-being. This also links to the conservation objectives within the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency, including enhancing environments to create more space for nature to grow and thrive through natural seeding, greening and by ending use of glyphosate herbicide to increase biodiversity and visual amenity.
- **Anglian Ruskin University research** into Community Assets & Health and Well Has been launched and being built into Alliance planning.

#### **Pre-existing inequalities within and between communities is reduced**

- Friday prayers are now being hosted outside St Botolph's Priory grounds, with social distancing in place
- The Community Response Team have been **contacting BAME communities** to understand the impact of Covid 19 on them and hear about any barriers they faced in lockdown

#### **Strengthen Volunteering, civic engagement & building on the strengths within Communities**

- C360 volunteer centre is developing action and managements plans. Training is in place for volunteer managers and a task & finish group is being set up
- Drafting of the CBC updated Community Enabling Strategy has begun. Planned to be presented at Cabinet in the autumn
- Planning for Officer & Member ABCD is underway. We are awaiting proposed timescales and costs

## **Council**

### **Restarting Council decision making and public participation in a digital environment**

- Following a full cycle of virtual Council Decision Making meetings, a review is being undertaken. Improvements include enabling members of the public to ask live questions at all public decision-making meetings in addition to the option to make written submissions.
- A report will be prepared for consideration by the September meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee on future meeting arrangements including the option of hybrid in person/virtual meetings
- The opportunity to trial virtual meetings has been useful and could be used in the future to reduce the environmental impact of these meetings, through reduced travel by officers and members, as well as reduced printing of papers.

### **Restore and adapt Council services harnessing the positive changes made**

- Services will be continually adapted as government guidance evolves
- Preparations are being made so services are prepared for any further controls in the event of a second wave of Covid-19.
- Officer based services continue to be delivered predominantly through home working but as government guidance changes more staff will be provided with the option of working at Rowan House. A review of office accommodation requirements is being undertaken following the demonstrable success of greater levels of homeworking. The mass shift to homeworking achieved in a short space of time has demonstrated its potential to become a greater part of Council working, bringing sustainability benefits including decreases in emissions and congestion throughout the borough because of reductions in staff travel to work. However, thought will have to be given to this approach to take account of the difficulties of homeworking for some staff, to ensure staff wellbeing is not impacted by any changes.

### **Review and revise our finances to deliver a balanced budget and sustainable MTFF**

- A thematic approach to developing a proposed budget strategy is being taken with each theme being led by an Assistant Director
- The Budget Strategy will be further developed and adapted over coming months to take account of any changes to the financial position

### **Reset the Councils Strategic Priorities**

- The programme of projects to deliver the Strategic Priorities are being reviewed to ensure they contribute to recovery and they can be delivered with the finance available.
- A revised Strategic Plan will be considered by Cabinet in September.



## **Reimagine and reinvent our services to meet our new priorities and budget**

- The thematic approach to the budget strategy includes identifying new commercial opportunities, service efficiencies through continuous improvement and digitisation and new delivery models in addition to fundamentally reviewing the Council's priorities for service delivery, for example in re-assessing the relationship between the Council, our partners and the Community. Many of these service changes, such as increased digitalisation of processes will bring environmental improvements in the way Council services are operated

## **Customer**

### **Undertake a review of all customer access channels considering Covid-19**

- Staff are working from home, providing the same services and support via web and phone
- Library staff will signpost any customers to our telephony and online channels
- Current provision is working well and all customers who need support are still able to access services

### **Keep customers updated with the resumption of council services**

- Comms are continuing to work with services and communicate how services are operating (normal, disrupted or closed) via weekly social media updates, which signposts to the website

### **Support customers to ease financial pressures caused by Covid-19**

- Having initially suspended recovery, normal recovery process has now resumed for Council Tax (excluding Court where we're waiting for news on when the courts will open up for C-Tax and Corporate Debt Recovery)
- Business Rates team continue to distribute Discretionary Grants which was extended with relaxed eligibility criteria
- Welfare Benefits Team currently meeting increased demand and offering valuable support to vulnerable residents

### **Adopt new ways of working with customers**

- The Contact Centre has been highly successful running from homes - performance has been excellent and we will encourage working from home going forward with digital processes to support this
- We continue to proactively work with customers to reduce payments by cheque

### **Real time customer data**

- Real-time data suites for LCTS, Land Charges, Planning, Building Control & Licensing delivered
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## **5. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications**

- 5.1 In alignment with the work on response to date, the emerging work on recovery has been informed by the requirements of the Coronavirus pandemic, the Coronavirus Act, Government guidance (statutory and non-statutory) and the invoking of General Emergency Powers in accordance with the Constitution.
- 5.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and has been submitted electronically. A link to the EIA is below:-

[Equality Impact Assessment](#)

- 5.3 As the Recovery plan emerges, further equality and diversity issues will be considered where policies or procedures emerge or change as a result of the Recovery Programme. This will include producing further Equality Impact Assessments where appropriate for individual areas of activity.
- 5.4 A Commons Select Committee inquiry was launched on 30 April to 'hear about the different and disproportionate impact that the Coronavirus – and measures to tackle it - is having on people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act'. Three further select committee enquiries were launched in June to consider the impact the Coronavirus and the measures to tackle it is having on BAME people, the gendered impact, disability and access to service inquiries.
- 5.5 The results of these inquiries will be considered when they are published and an assessment of how they are addressed in the plan, alongside all considerations relating to Equality, Diversity and Human Rights as outlined in Council policy.

## **6. Strategic Plan References**

- 6.1 The Recovery work aligns with the Council's existing strategic priorities; however, it is likely the future strategic priorities of the Council will need to be reviewed considering the significant economic and social impacts of the Pandemic. The future Recovery Plan will be aligned with those priorities.

## **7. Consultation**

- 7.1 Consultation and engagement with all sectors of the community, business and other partners and stakeholders will be considered and included in the development of the Recovery plan in relation to individual areas of activity and cell objectives where appropriate.

## **8. Publicity Considerations**

- 8.1 The Recovery plan and each area of work will be promoted utilising the Council's communication channels, with communication plans attached to major project areas. The plan will be published on the website and promoted through social and other media.

## **9. Financial implications**

- 9.1 As referenced in the report the financial considerations in the development of the plan will be considered at every point of the plan development process and are identified as a cross-cutting workstream.

## **10. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications**

- 10.1 The Health and well-being of residents is a primary consideration in the development of the entire Recovery Plan with specific objectives in the Community cell outlined in 4.14 above and Appendix A, referring to working with partners to drive the neighbourhood model of care and embed opportunities for improved health and well-being with higher levels of activity, engagement with arts and culture and improving mental health.

## **11. Health and Safety Implications**

- 11.1 The development of the plan will comply with existing health and safety legislation and the Council's policy.

## **12. Risk Management Implications**

- 12.1 Risk management will be a key part of the development of the plan and risk assessed for projects according to the council's current risk management framework.

## **13. Environmental and Sustainability Implications**

- 13.1 Environmental and sustainability considerations are considered of paramount importance in the Recovery Programme with a specific 'Climate Change and Sustainability' cross cutting work stream running through all the cells. Each opportunity will be considered in relation to the Climate Emergency Action Plan to ensure that the Council's climate change, environmental and sustainability ambitions and policies are actively addressed and promoted throughout the development of the Recovery Plan in all areas.

## **Appendices**

Appendix A: Colchester Borough Council's Recovery Plan

Appendix B: Programme structure and framework