



Item

## **CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL OUTLINE CORONAVIRUS RECOVERY PLAN**

**To:**

Councillor Lewis Herbert, Leader and Executive Councillor for Strategy and External Partnerships  
Strategy & Resources Scrutiny Committee 06/07/2020

**Report by:**

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**Wards affected:**

All

Not a Key Decision

### **1. Executive Summary**

1.1 This report provides a brief summary of the actions taken by Cambridge City Council in response to the Coronavirus emergency in the Spring of 2020, and sets out the key areas of activity and emerging issues that the Council is working on as it develops its recovery plan.

1.2 F. The UK Government announced a “lockdown” approach to containing the pandemic on 23 March. Since that point, services across the Council have rapidly adapted to a very fast moving and dynamic context to:

- continue to provide essential services as far as it has been safe to do so;
- implement Government policy as it has evolved; and
- put in place new working arrangements and new models of service delivery to protect those residents and businesses most affected by the lockdown.

1.3 This type of long-term crisis management has been a new experience for the Council and has seen a huge effort from all staff and elected members to keep the city safe and functioning.

1.4 Key achievements have included:

- the payment of £21,295,000 business support grants
- facilitation and funding for 14 ward-based community led clusters providing support for vulnerable residents
- keeping 140 homeless people safe by finding temporary accommodation in hotels and other appropriate places
- keeping core council services working through out, although delivered in different ways in some cases.

1.5 As the peak of the health crisis appeared to pass in April, the Council's focus has moved onto planning for the recovery phase. The Council's priorities moving forward will be to support the economic, social and environmental recovery of the city. In doing so we aim to support the most vulnerable members of our communities and to build a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient Cambridge for the future.

1.6 Above all, the Council's over-arching priority is to ensure that Cambridge continues to be a safe place to live, work, study and visit.

1.7 We are in a very fluid situation and this report reflects Government advice and policy at the time of writing. There may well be changes in the intervening period before the committee meeting that impact on the report's content and, if so, these will be picked up verbally at the meeting.

## **2. Recommendations**

2.1 The Executive Councillor is recommended to:

- i. Note the Council's response to the Coronavirus emergency
- ii. Agree the priorities for recovery

## **3. Background**

3.1 The new Coronavirus-19 was identified to the World Health Organisation on 31 December 2019, following an outbreak in Wuhan, China. The first cases in the UK appeared in late January. On 3 March, the UK Government published its plan to contain, delay and mitigate any outbreak.

3.2 On 7 March, those with symptoms were asked to self-isolate for 7 days. On 16 March, the Government introduced shielding for the most vulnerable and called on the British public to cease non-essential contact and travel. On 18 March, the Government announced the closure of schools.

3.3 On 20 March, entertainment, hospitality and indoor leisure venues were closed. And on 23 March, the Government took the key decision to introduce the Stay at Home guidance, essentially putting the UK into “lockdown”.

## **4. The Emergency response**

4.1 Cambridge City Council made a number of rapid responses to the crisis, which have continued to evolve in the subsequent weeks and months.

### **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Resilience Forum**

4.2 The formal, multi-agency emergency response is co-ordinated through the Strategic Co-ordination Group, established through the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Resilience Forum, in line with our statutory responsibilities under the Civil Contingencies Act. The Council is represented on both the tactical and strategic groups and contributed to a number of specific workstreams within the response phase.

### **Impact on City Council services**

4.3 The lockdown meant that the Council needed to close those facilities and services that depend on public gatherings and face-to-face contact. This was to protect both the public users of such services and council staff. The Corn Exchange, community centres, swimming pools and the Arbury Road and Customer Service Centre receptions all closed, though face-to-face contact was still available for urgent issues via an appointments-based system.

4.4 From 24 March onwards, everyone who could do so began working from home, utilizing the potential for remote working made possible by the

Council's investment in Council Anywhere technology. This enabled a number of office spaces to shut down completely including the Guildhall.

4.5 Some services were able to carry on working largely unchanged, either through staff working remotely (e.g. the Shared Planning Service) or by continuing to deliver essential services on the ground (e.g. Streets and Open Spaces and Estates and Facilities maintaining emergency housing repairs). Other services had to scale down dramatically or establish new ways of working and new models of delivery.

4.6 One service that needed to find new ways of working was the Shared Waste Service. The service moved to two crew members per vehicle rather than the usual three in response to both absence through self-isolation in the early weeks, and the need to keep crews safely distant. This meant fewer bins could be collected per round, so green waste collections were suspended in April. Green waste collections were re-started from 4 May, initially only guaranteeing one collection per four-week cycle but achieving full fortnightly collections in 85% of cases during in May.

4.7 Some services needed to provide more capacity because of the impact of the virus. The Bereavement service increased capacity to enable 33 cremations a day extending the working period to 16 hours through the use of shifts although, thankfully, to-date this extra capacity has not been needed. The Bereavement service has continued to deliver a safe, caring and compassionate service in a hugely uncertain environment, particularly supporting families to deal with the emotional stress of restricted attendance at funerals.

4.8 One service that has been able to expand parts of its business during the lockdown has been the Fleet Service. The service successfully maintained its support to the Shared Waste Service and East Cambs Waste fleet and other clients. As other private garages closed their doors, the resilience of the Council's service meant it also picked up an additional £63k of commercial fleet maintenance, which is helping to offset the loss of private and taxi work.

## **Community support**

4.9 The lockdown and shielding requirements created a new set of needs in the community for both practical and emotional support.

4.10 The County Council was responsible for providing support to the most clinically vulnerable “shielded” group, with district councils, including the City Council, co-ordinating support to other vulnerable people at a local level.

4.11 A countywide Community Resilience Group brought together public bodies and voluntary groups to help co-ordinate the complementary efforts.

4.12 In Cambridge, the Community Services team helped support a network of community-led organisations who have co-ordinated local ‘good neighbour’ support. Each ward had a ‘lead ward organisation’ and these were a mix of churches, community groups, mutual aid groups, and other local fora. As a cohort, they have worked successfully in their communities, with each other, and with the Council and other agencies.

4.13 The city also had its own local Community Resilience Group bringing partners together across agencies which responded to issues raised by the lead community organisations. This group either resolved issues locally or escalated them where necessary. A phone and web-based service was created as a referral point for more complex cases and a resource to support the lead organisations. The Council also made a contribution to the Cambridge Community Foundation’s Coronavirus Fund, to support community activities benefiting the most needy and vulnerable.

4.14 The Council did not just wait for referrals to be made to the Community Resilience Group. County and local datasets were used proactively to target categories of people who might have had vulnerabilities, to make sure they were aware of the support available and were able to access it.

4.15 The scale of community involvement has been inspiring. In some wards, there were strong existing partnerships but in others new community responses emerged. The Council funded each of these ward-based clusters, allocated a Community Development Officer and, in each ward, one of the three city councillors took a lead councillor role, working alongside their relevant County councillors.

4.16 The Food Poverty Alliance Partnership, particularly Cambridge Sustainable Food, have played a vital role cooking and distributing over 2 tonnes of food each week to individuals and families.

## **Business support**

4.17 The Council has also played a key role in disbursing Government business support grants totaling £21,295,000 in value to 1,400 businesses, as well as managing business rates relief and council tax support programmes. This mammoth logistical task required close co-operation with the Cambridge Business Improvement District and other business network groups. The Council managed to process the applications and grants at a pace that exceeded most other councils in the country.

4.18 The Local Authority Discretionary Grant scheme, launched in June, expanded grant funding to businesses, charities and not-for-profit organisations that have not previously received government support under the other Covid-19 measures. The Council has also provided support to market traders and our own commercial tenants.

4.19 We have sought to work collaboratively with our partners in South Cambridgeshire District Council on business support and economic recovery. A joint member task & finish group was established, supported by a joint officer working group, which brought in resources from the Greater Cambridge Partnership to provide additional capacity. The group informs, and is informed by, the business recovery sub-group and Mayoral business forum that form part of the wide Local Resilience Forum response. Aside from working with business network groups to identify business issues and solutions, the group has commissioned local economic analysis data as an evidence base for recovery solutions. It has also established weekly business newsletters bringing together information around current issues, solutions and funding support.

4.20 The Council's city centre car parks were largely empty during the first phase of lockdown and we were able to use this spare capacity to offer free parking for key workers.

## **Homelessness**

4.21 A third key area of new activity was the provision of temporary accommodation for all the city's homeless and rough-sleeping people. On 24 March, the Government set a target of getting all rough sleepers off the street by 27 March. This was partly in recognition of the underlying health needs of many rough sleepers who were particularly susceptible to the

virus. The Government provided an initial funding commitment of £24,750 and using that funding, the Council's homelessness service worked tirelessly to find, engage with, and accommodate all those in need of accommodation. Those housed included individuals with no recourse to public funds, where the Council would not normally have a duty to accommodate them.

4.22 The first rough sleeper was accommodated on Friday, 20 March and since then 162 offers of accommodation have been made leading up to and including 29 May; 140 people were in accommodation on that date.

4.23 This process also provided the opportunity to engage with more rough sleepers across a multi-agency range of services, to help prepare them for a longer-term housing solution and support appropriate for each person.

### **Impacts on staff**

4.24 In the initial phase of the virus, we anticipated that more services might be more severely impacted by high numbers of staff members becoming ill or self-isolating because they or members of their household developed Covid-19 symptoms. As the emergency evolved, and lockdown appeared to be effective, the numbers of staff reporting illness or self-isolating dropped. At its peak, the number of staff reported off at one time was 108.

4.25 Some staff who were not fully occupied in their usual role, were redeployed into other services, particularly to help the efforts to support the community effort and work with rough sleepers.

4.26 For those services that could not continue while lockdown was in place, the Council made use of the Government's furloughing scheme (this included Cambridge Live, some areas within Community Services and the Estates and Facilities teams who carry out routine maintenance work). This has ensured that those staff have continued to receive full pay, while the Council will claim back 80% of those salary costs from the Government. In total, 131 staff were furloughed.

4.27 For those who have been able to work from home, homeworking on such a large scale presented a major change to ways of working for many staff. Supportive HR policies and support and management arrangements were put in place to help staff adapt.

4.28 Without the ability to hold face-to-face meetings, extensive use has been made of the video-conferencing facilities in MS Teams, and this has become the norm for many.

## **Democratic processes**

4.29 One early casualty of the crisis was the planned election in May 2020 for all 42 council seats following a boundary review. This has meant that councillors' terms of office have been extended to May 2021 and there will be no by-elections before then (unless the government changes legislation in the autumn).

4.30 The government also introduced legislation to enable virtual committee and council meetings for the first time. Councillors have been supported to make use of MS Teams for both informal and formal meetings. From mid-May onwards, decision-making meetings of the Council and its committees have been held in public view using MS Teams. This has included the Annual Meeting of the Council on 28 May, this current cycle of scrutiny meetings, as well as regulatory committees including the Planning and Licensing committees. A number of Member briefings have also been held using MS Teams. These have been well attended, suggesting this may be a better format than face-to-face briefings for many Members who are juggling work and domestic commitments with being a councillor.

4.31 This major shift in how we manage meetings has presented both technical and cultural challenges to all concerned. It has been effectively implemented by the Democratic services and 3C ICT teams, with no major disruptions, thanks to careful planning, practice and learning.

## **5. Recovery planning**

5.1 Once the emergency response appeared to stabilise, the Council and its partners increasingly turned their thoughts to the recovery phase.

5.2 On 10 May, the Government announced a phased approach to lifting lockdown with a strategy which is dependent on the level of infection rates in the population.

5.3 The Council's recovery work is built around four recovery themes which are underpinned by detailed Council workstreams. The workstreams cover a mixture of short-term operational responses, managing a transition to a "new



normal” and longer-term more strategic issues. Each of these specific workstreams is led by a member of the Senior Management Team.

5.4 The four recovery themes are:

- a) Economic recovery and support to business
- b) Social recovery and anti-poverty work
- c) Environmental recovery
- d) Council recovery

5.5 The first three themes include direct delivery by the Council but also significant delivery and joint work in a wide range of partnerships, building on the many contributions of other organisations during the epidemic response. It also assumes continued future Council input into that joint work, such as the Local Resilience Forum leadership and wider strategic thinking with partner agencies.

5.6 The themes are described in more detail below with their supporting workstreams.

## **6. Economic recovery and support to business**

6.1 Recent data showing a rise in Cambridge unemployment evidences the ongoing loss of jobs which it is feared will increase as furlough funding ends. Cambridge and Oxford, along with similar cities, have the bulk of local employment focused in a small number of sectors, several of which have been seriously impacted by the lockdown and which will take time to recover. Greater Cambridge is vital to the wider sub-regional economy. The numbers of people employed in the area is much greater than the number of residents in the two council areas.

6.2 Challenged sectors with significant employment in Cambridge include the city centre and retail, the visitor economy and hospitality, and education. Each have significant obstacles to full recovery and the continuing expansion of employment that had been the trend before the epidemic hit.

### ***Workstream 1 - Support to business***

*Workstream lead: Fiona Bryant*

6.3 In the short term, this workstream has been focused on the administration of the various business grant schemes that the government has introduced. It has been also supporting the joint Member working group between the City and South Cambs councils which has focused on how the two councils can support economic recovery in the medium to long term.

6.4 This workstream will build on Cambridge employment sector analysis and responses to each of the sectors, work with business networks and the voluntary sector, and the role of the Council in direct investment in the city

6.5 Part of the objectives of this area of work will be to maximise the continuance of existing jobs and the creation of new ones, working with businesses to continue to employ furloughed staff as Government funding ends.

6.6 This area of work also feeds into the Combined Authority's Business Recovery Group with the aim of ensuring regional and national strategies are informed by the needs and issues of Cambridge businesses.

*See also Work stream 5 - Opening up the city centre below*

## **7. Social recovery**

7.1 The impact of Covid-19 has created new needs in the community and there are likely to be long term impacts on individuals and families given the core challenges that existed before the epidemic, and the expectation that economic and other impacts from the epidemic will continue long after it is over. As one example, since the start of the pandemic, the number of council tax reduction claims has increased significantly. Beforehand, we received approximately 30 claims a month but this increased to 300 per month during April and May. The rate of increase fell in the second half of May but it is too early to understand what the long term trend will be.

7.2 The Council's has three specific workstreams focused on the issues around social recovery.

### ***Work stream 2 - Welfare benefit issues and anti-poverty***

*Workstream Lead: Alison Cole*

7.3 This workstream is focused on how we support residents that may find themselves in increased financial hardship because of the impact of the virus on employment in the city. This will include tackling with others additional poverty impacts beyond the epidemic and reviewing our partnerships and funding for voluntary sector action

### ***Works Stream 3 - Communities and neighbourhood working***

*Workstream Lead: Debbie Kaye*

7.4 At the appropriate time, this workstream will manage the transition away from organised support to those who are shielding or need to stay self-isolated.

7.5 Given the need and opportunity to review the Council's local relationships and service delivery, in the longer term the workstream will be focusing on how we can build on the wonderful examples of community spirit and self-organisation we have seen in our community aid groups and community food hubs and continue to build community capacity. We will review how we can maintain an ongoing dialogue and work with these groups and our approach to neighborhood working. This will include how we work with others in the voluntary sector and other agencies, such as the County Council, as they make changes to key services such as adult and social care.

### ***Workstream 4 - Homelessness and rough sleeping***

*Workstream Lead: David Greening*

7.6 This workstream is focused on moving the rough sleepers we have in emergency accommodation into suitable accommodation for their needs with appropriate support and care packages. It will also inform our new Homelessness strategy. There is an initial report on progress going to Housing Scrutiny Committee this cycle.

## **8. Environmental recovery**

8.1 This is the third element of the city's future sustainability. The Council already has a core priority to address climate change; work towards net zero emissions and implement the Council's biodiversity strategy. This work will be informed by the need to support recovery and the opportunities this brings. This is a theme that also cuts across, each of the other workstreams.

8.2 The Council will work to support opportunities to promote non-car transport and aim to reduce the level of congestion and city centre air

pollution as well as increase cycling and walking compared to pre-epidemic levels, working with the County Council and Greater Cambridge Partnership and others.

### ***Works Stream 5 - Opening up the city centre***

*Workstream Lead: Joel Carre*

8.3 This workstream has been focused initially on enabling the city centre to re-open in accordance with the Government's road map and guidance. It has focused in particular on the operational adjustments needed to minimise social contact, maintain social distancing and facilitate access and movement through the city centre safely.

8.4 As lockdown eases the Council's open spaces have also come under more pressure and there has been a need to consider how we best join up our licensing and enforcement powers to support social distancing and tackle anti-social behaviour. In the longer term, this workstream will be looking at supporting the role of our open spaces and local centres in the life of the city.

8.5 It will also look at the city centre's role in the social, economic and environmental recovery of the wider city and sub-region.

8.6 It also includes joining up with the County Council and Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) on new sustainable travel choices.

## **9. Council recovery**

9.1 The Council will also need to respond to the major financial impacts and costs of the epidemic. The net negative financial impacts substantially exceed the funding allocation Government has provided, or is expected to provide, for district councils including Cambridge. There is a separate report on the financial impact on the agenda for this Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

9.2 Changes to delivery and practice during the epidemic offer the opportunity to start from a different base. We need to ensure that the positive impacts of the lockdown experience are retained or developed. In particular, the new ways of working that our staff and residents have embraced; and the environmental and air quality improvements that life in lockdown has prompted.

9.3 We also need to recognise that we still do not know what the long-term impact of the virus will be and we will need to be prepared in case there is a second wave.

***Work stream 6 - What is the “new reality”/ “new normal”?***

*Workstream lead: Andrew Limb*

9.4 This workstream has been assessing local and national data, guidance and other insight to help inform other workstreams. This includes health, economic and social trends.

***Workstream 7 - Financial Impact***

*Workstream Lead: Caroline Ryba*

9.5 This workstream is focused on the immediate and longer-term financial impact of Covid 19 on the Council. There is a need to address both immediate in-year pressures and to assess longer term issues that will impact on our forward planning assumptions.

9.6 As noted above, there is a separate report on the financial impact on the agenda for this Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee. The longer-term issues will be picked up through the MTFs and budget setting reports.

***Workstream 8 - Coming back into the workplace***

*Workstream Lead: Dave Prinsep*

9.7 This work stream is addressing the practical accommodation needs of staff and Members in the short, medium, and long term.

9.8 In the short term, the work is focusing on a phased opening of buildings and the measures needed to keep them safe and hygienic.

9.9 The underlying assumption of this workstream is that working from home will become the default for many staff and this will inform a longer-term office accommodation strategy.

***Workstream 9 - Issues impacting on Staff***

*Workstream Lead: Deborah Simpson*

9.10 This workstream is focusing particularly on the issues affecting staff. In the short term, this has included the temporary redeployment and furloughing of some teams.

9.11 It has also focused on the practical and emotional support needs of staff to cope with the impact of the virus and new ways of working.

***Workstream 10 - Customer contact***

*Workstream Lead: Elissa Rospigliosi*

9.12 This workstream is focused on the way we deliver customer services to residents and build on our digital strategy, maximising the opportunities of digital by default.

***Workstream 11 - Working with the wider Local Resilience Forum's recovery work***

9.13 In addition to our own recovery plans, the Council will continue to work with partners in the academic, business and community sectors to promote practices, policies and projects that strengthen our cohesiveness as a community, and our safety and resilience to this and future threats.

9.14 At the countywide level, the Local Resilience Forum has established a Recovery Co-ordination Group and this in turn has set up sub-groups on:

- Business and Economic Recovery
- Criminal Justice
- Vulnerable People
- Environment
- Community
- Finance
- Health
- Public Health

9.15 All of these groups are seeking to support Cambridgeshire's communities in recovering well from the impacts of lockdown and our own recovery planning will dovetail with them.

9.16 The Council's Environmental Health service is also playing a role in the local response to the national Test, Track and Trace programme.

**10. Impact on Future service delivery**

10.1 Alongside the thematic workstreams outlined above, we will also be evaluating on a service-by-service basis what the impact of Covid 19 will be on future service delivery. At the time of writing, there are also some unresolved issues about the timing of the opening of some services such as community centres, as we await government guidance on the future easing of lockdown.

10.2 Changes in the external environment and customer and community behaviour will influence how we may need to deliver services in future. Those services which rely on external income will also need to review their planning assumptions to make sure their business cases are still viable.

10.3 The Covid crisis has meant that we have continued to provide many services but delivered them in different ways. We will need to consider what changes have been successful and we would want to keep in place; what we may need to do differently or stop; and what might be unsustainable in its traditional form.

10.4 We will also be assessing whether there are new demands emerging, for example, if we see higher rates of unemployment in the city.

10.5 All these issues may not all be clear immediately and will need to feed these considerations into future budget and service planning.

## **11. Implications**

### **a) Financial Implications**

These are set out in a separate paper on this agenda presented by the Head of Finance.

### **b) Staffing Implications**

As outlined in the report. The Chief Executive and Head of HR have met regularly with the Trade Unions during the period of lockdown and they have been involved in risk assessments of new ways of working and the future arrangements for office accommodation.

### **c) Equality and Poverty Implications**

Social recovery is a key theme in this report.

The economic impact of lockdown has been severe. There is some evidence (anecdotal to-date) that those likely to be most severely adversely affected are those in the lowest-paid, most-insecure employment, notably in the hospitality and leisure sector. There will

also be people who fall into economic hardship for the first time as a result of business closures and uncertainty.

The Council's new Anti-Poverty Strategy identifies these groups as likely to need particular support from the Council and its partners in the months and years ahead.

**d) Environmental Implications**

Environmental recovery is a key theme in this report.

Data from the Council's air quality sensors, and the County Council's traffic monitoring service, saw significant environmental improvements during lockdown, primarily due to the reduction in vehicular movements. The challenge will be to retain these improvements as lockdown eases, particularly with the public discouraged from using public transport due to the strictures of social distancing. It is hoped that many more people will more routinely work from home (having experienced the benefits of such practices during lockdown), reducing the number who routinely commute into the city.

**e) Procurement Implications**

Economic recovery is a key theme of this report.

The Council has sought to support suppliers who may have been facing particular hardship during lockdown.

**f) Community Safety Implications**

The Council has continued to monitor community safety issues. While there was a drop in all reported crime in the initial phases of lockdown, there was an increased risk of domestic violence and, as lockdown has eased, we have worked closely with our partners to monitor and respond to changing community safety pressures.

**12. Consultation and communication considerations**

n/a

**13. Background papers**

[OUR PLAN TO REBUILD](#): The UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy

**14. Inspection of papers**



To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report, please contact Antoinette Jackson, Chief Executive, tel: 01223 457001, email: [antoinette.jackson@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:antoinette.jackson@cambridge.gov.uk) .