

Meeting: Overview Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Date: 5 August 2020

Title: Covid-19 Recovery Framework and Progress

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Service: Corporate Strategy

Wards affected: All

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Overview, Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee on the council's Recovery Framework (the Framework) for Covid-19. The report will provide an update on the four strategic objectives from the Framework.

1.2 A copy of the Authority's Framework is appended to this report and sets out how work is being taken forward to move from the Covid-19 crisis response phase to the recovery phase.

1.3 The Framework was agreed by Cabinet on 29 June 2020.

1.4 The Framework is shaped by the Our North Tyneside Plan and the Authority's core values:

- we listen – our detailed plans will be informed through engagement with council staff, residents, businesses, community/voluntary sector and other partners
- we care – the health and safety of our teams and residents will be our top priority at all times and our Customer Service Programme vision will continue throughout
- we are ambitious – we will take this opportunity to be flexible, innovative and to stop doing what we no longer need; to keep and nurture what we value and to hold on to the new things we do (“build back better”); and
- we are good value for money – tight financial control, planning and risk management will continue to be a priority.

2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the approach set out in the Recovery Framework and work to date.

3. Details

3.1 The Committee are aware that Covid-19 has imposed significant and additional demands on the Authority, its partners and all aspects of local private and public services. Local partners, the Local Authority and NHS services, have been working together proactively since the start of the pandemic, to understand and respond to these challenges.

3.2 Whilst this continues to be an iterative process, the Authority's Recovery Framework is a structured approach, with clear stages built upon strategic objectives from the Our North Tyneside Plan:

- Our People
- Our Places
- Our Economy, and
- Our Organisation.

Each of the strategic objectives has a number of workstreams which will manage activity to move through the Recovery Framework phases.

OUR PEOPLE

3.3 Health and Wellbeing

3.3.1 The incidence of COVID-19 in North Tyneside remains low, as it does across the North East region. The localised outbreaks witnessed nationally are likely to continue to characterise the next period of the pandemic, with a possible resurgence of Coronavirus infection levels during the autumn/winter period.

3.3.2 Infection prevention and control measures remain the key mechanisms to control transmission of the virus. There has been and will continue to be a strong emphasis on promoting and encouraging respiratory and hand hygiene and social distancing.

3.3.3 The Local Outbreak Management Plan and associated governance structures are now in place to ensure that there is capacity and capability to implement preventative measures and early identification and response to outbreaks in North Tyneside.

3.3.4 Physical and mental wellbeing of our residents remains an important priority within the recovery phase and work has included support for residents to stop smoking given the increased risks of COVID-19 and promoting physical activity as a means to improve general wellbeing as well as burning calories. The recently published obesity strategy to get the nation fit and healthy, protect themselves against COVID-19 and protect the NHS will support further work in this area.

3.3.5 The forthcoming winter period and flu season will be challenging in the midst of a pandemic. Work has commenced on developing a plan with partners to mitigate the impact on social care and the NHS, this includes promoting high uptake of the flu vaccination particularly in high risk groups.

3.4 Social Care

3.4.1 Services involving the direct delivery of care for critical wellbeing, from both council teams and the independent sector, have continued to be delivered during the period but within the relevant social distancing measures outlined by Government.

3.4.2 Residential care and support for both adults and children and young people has continued but again, within the restrictions set out by Government. Occupancy in older persons care homes reduced significantly due to deaths and reduced admissions. The market is starting to see admissions to care homes resume. Support to this sector has been significant throughout the pandemic and continues including delivering training, provision of staff, supporting with PPE, help to interpret national guidance and support to answer individual questions about managing difficult situations within the published guidance.

3.4.3 Adult social work has taken advantage of the "easements" in the Care Act 2014 as set out in the Coronavirus Act 2020. They have operated at Level 2, which means all services have continued but with a proportionate approach to assessments and care planning. This has meant the majority of assessments and care planning, have taken place over telephone or video.

3.4.4 Social care continues to monitor demand for care and support. Demand at Gateway has reduced from a peak during the pandemic but remains higher than pre-Covid-19 levels. Demand for hospital discharges has reduced and there is currently sufficient capacity with the homecare market.

3.4.5 Childrens' services have delivered reduced numbers of face to face visits, instead carrying out telephone and video assessments and interventions. As national measures have relaxed, the proportion of visits carried out face to face has begun to increase. From 1 August, all statutory social work visits to children and families will be carried out in person; this will be in line with all of the required risk assessments and national safety guidance.

3.4.6 Requests for support for domestic abuse are continuing to increase across the Northumbria Police area. This has meant an increase in work for the childrens' services teams in North Tyneside but they continue to respond within timescales to all work.

3.4.7 The Director of Public Health has written to all care home owners in the Borough to give notice that she approves the opening of homes to visitors, if they wish to do so, and they can comply with the relevant safety guidance.

3.5 Community and Support for the Critically Vulnerable / Shielded

3.5.1 A small workstream group continues to meet weekly to oversee the Community and Voluntary Sector and volunteering recovery action plan.

3.5.2 Weekly support calls are now being made to 471 people, from a peak of 1,778 people. This is likely to be the remaining cohort of people who have support needs that will continue into the next phase of recovery.

3.5.3 From the 1 August, the number of virtual support hubs will reduce from 4 to 1, in line with the overall reduction in the number of people requiring support. A local support hub will be required until at least December 2020 and resources for this have been agreed.

3.6 Schools

3.6.1 The School Improvement Team continue to work with schools on planning for the safe return of all children and young people in September, with a focus on blended learning of classroom and home-based activities.

3.6.2 It is too early to assess the impact of the lockdown and pandemic on educational attainment.

3.6.3 An education strategy is being developed which will incorporate a recovery plan to support schools and the education sector from the impact of the pandemic.

3.6.4 A letter has been received from the Minister for Roads, Buses and Places regarding preparation for home to school transport ahead of the return to school in September. Officers are currently assessing the implications and working with Nexus on this matter.

OUR PLACES

3.7 Housing Property and Construction

3.7.1 Following agreement from the Head of Service and Cabinet Member the following work has re-started week commencing 29 June:

- planned external decoration works across the borough
- planned fencing replacement work across the borough
- planned roofing replacement works across the borough
- planned external brickwork repair works across the borough; and
- non-urgent and routine responsive repairs to the internal of tenants' homes by appointment.

3.7.2 A revised spend profile for all Planned Capital works was submitted for inclusion at June's Investment Programme Board.

3.7.3 Officers are looking at options to accelerate some work within the Housing Asset Management Plan to increase works that can be delivered this year.

3.8 Highways and Town Centres

3.8.1 All Category 1 and 2 highway defects are being repaired in line with policy timescales. The highway inspection regime has now returned to its pre-Covid-19 programme.

3.8.2 The carriageway resurfacing programme is underway and on programme. Other planned maintenance schemes have now restarted with restrictions on working hours to allow staggered shifts in order to maintain social distancing requirements.

3.8.3 The major project at Southern Promenade has commenced.

3.8.4 Parking enforcement has re-started.

3.8.5 Work is underway to determine a process for dealing with pavement licence applications as a result of the Business and Planning Act.

3.8.6 Measures to implement the emergency active travel fund schemes were introduced on 30 June.

3.9 Covid Secure Workplaces

3.9.1 The North Tyneside Council Standard guidance for operating buildings during the pandemic, has been reviewed and refreshed in line with the most recent Government and public health guidance. All works to phase 1 buildings were completed on 25 July. Surveys of phase 2 buildings will be complete by early September.

3.10 Culture, Sport & Leisure

3.10.1 Saint Mary's Lighthouse and Segedunum opened week commencing 27 July.

3.10.2 There has been a phased reopening of all 5 leisure centres and the gym at John Willie Sam's centre, starting with gym and other activities such as exercise classes and group activities following after the initial phase has been evaluated.

3.10.3 Whitley Bay Min Golf opened week commencing 27 July.

3.10.4 The Football Association has announced the intention to restart grass roots football. The team are reviewing guidance and assessing options for North Tyneside.

3.10.5 All play sites are now open across the Borough.

3.11 Environmental Operations

3.11.1 As the Committee is aware, refuse collection has continued throughout the pandemic, observing national safety guidance.

3.11.2 Toilets at the following sites have reopened – Tynemouth park, Whitley Bay Metro, Churchill Playing Fields, Wallsend park, Rising Sun Countryside Park and the Ferry Landing at North Shields.

3.11.3 Cafes at Wallsend park and Northumberland Park are now open.

3.11.4 Bedding plants are being planted out across the borough.

3.11.5 Grass cutting is at approximately 95%.

OUR ECONOMY

3.12 Business

3.12.1 Baseline metrics to understand the post coronavirus economic landscape are in place and will continue to be refined. The measures help to assess where the greatest impact has been, and which sectors have been affected. Approval has been received to accept the North of Tyne Capacity Fund resources which will fund the 'Back to Work' service providing flexible, immediate and responsive support to address employment issues faced by businesses and individuals.

3.12.2 Work is ongoing to support and monitor the reopening of our town centres, including the number of vacant units and business closures, as well as new start-ups.

3.12.3 Support and advice to all businesses is ongoing. This is supported by a comprehensive communication and engagement strategy which advises both businesses and visitors on social

distancing in town centres and includes advice following the announcements regarding the reopening of pubs and restaurants.

3.12.4 Work is ongoing to refine the Town Centre recovery plan; current activity has focussed on the re-opening of our centres which has required significant resource.

3.12.5 Support to a wide range of businesses has been ongoing through the Discretionary Fund which has provided financial assistance to businesses with fixed property related costs.

3.13 Jobs

3.13.1 The Chancellor of the Exchequer presented his 'Plan for Jobs' to Parliament on Wednesday 8 July 2020 to outline how the government will boost job creation in the UK. Discussions are underway with the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Education in relation to the design and implementation of these schemes.

3.13.2 Allocation of the £2m Hardship Grant, allocated from Government to support working age adults who claim council tax support, continues.

OUR ORGANISATION

3.14 Finance

3.14.1 The impact of COVID-19 on the Trading Company is being modelled and will be reported through to the Trading Company's Board.

3.14.2 Finance officers have been identified for each recovery workstream to ensure that the finance team are aware of the estimated financial impact of recovery for each area.

3.14.3 The next return for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLH) is due on 31 July 2020. At the last Finance workstream meeting (20/07/2020) the team worked through the implications of the recent announcement in relation to income cost pressures. A detailed methodology for review of income cost pressures is in development with Engie Finance to ensure a consistent approach is applied across the organisation. The Authority will be required to submit a return to the MHCLG and this will be open to external scrutiny.

3.14.4 Allocations for Tranche 3 of Local Support Grant was announced on 16 July 2020. The Authority received a further £1.777m which brings the total support grant received to date to £14.308m.

3.14.5 An initial review of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Plan has been undertaken and the results have been included in the report to Cabinet on 3 August 2020. The basis for the review is as per information which had been shared with SLT on 9 July 2020 and subsequently to Lead Members on 13 July 2020.

3.15 Digital Connectivity

3.15.1. Additional kit for those working from home has been procured and issued. A small working group has been established to monitor home connectivity issues and to ensure employees are able to work remotely effectively.

3.16 Human Resources/Organisational Development

3.16.1 The Authority is following all national guidance in relation to working practices and support for its employees. The position remains, that people should work from home unless there is a business or personal reason why this is not possible to do so. The Recovery Coordinating Group (RCG) is overseeing building re-openings and any return to building based work or service restarts.

3.16.2 A significant number of new and revised policies and support arrangements for employees have been produced during the pandemic. These build upon the Authority's existing employee support packages and cover areas such as home working, wellbeing and caring responsibilities.

3.16.3 A 'pulse' survey has been undertaken to assess the impact and views of employees and this will be repeated throughout the recovery process.

3.16.4 A comprehensive pack of building, service, team and individual risk assessments and planning tools has been established and all teams are working with these tools.

3.17 Political and Democratic Recovery

3.17.1 Members will now be familiar with virtual meetings, and the Authority has successfully conducted a number of such meetings over the past months. In line with the position reported to Cabinet, it is intended that, until future notice, all meetings will continue to be held virtually. In addition, planning for the 2021 elections, which now comprise the Mayoral election, the Police and Crime Commissioner election, the election of 1/3 of the Council, and two by-elections, is underway with planning taking specific account of the Covid-19 uncertainty; however, such planning is at an early stage, and will continue to adapt to changing circumstances.

4. Appendices

- Covid-19 – A Framework for Recovery in North Tyneside. Report to North Tyneside Council Cabinet, 29 June 2020