

Chichester District Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 27 October 2020

Covid 19 – Progress Covid 19 Recovery Action Plans

1. Contacts

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2. Executive Summary

This Report provides an update on the latest financial position and sets out progress on the Covid 19 Recovery Action Plans, the Efficiency Review and Service Framework Review.

3. Recommendations

3.1 The Committee is invited to note the contents of this report and make any comments to Cabinet.

4. Background

4.1 In June 2020 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommended to Cabinet that it should support the four thematic recovery plans:

- Community and Housing;
- Economic;
- Planning, Health and Environmental Protection; and
- Organisational.

It also endorsed the Future Services Framework and the governance arrangements, and it requested that progress on these be reported to the Committee every 3 months. Cabinet subsequently approved these plans at its meeting in July 2020.

Financial Update

4.2 In July 2020 Corporate Governance and Audit Committee were advised that the 2020-21 budget was likely to be in deficit by more than £8m, and a residual deficit of £2m per annum was likely by the end of the 5 year financial planning period (2025-26). If not addressed this would have resulted in the use of a total of £24m of reserves over the period 2020-21 to 2025-26.

4.3 Over recent months, and following relaxation of lockdown measures, the Council's income streams had gradually started to improve. In addition, the Government announced a support package for councils who were suffering significant reductions in their income from sales, fees and charges. The current forecasts, taking into account the new government support package indicates that the current year's deficit is likely to be in the region of £3.2m and a total draw against reserves of £14m if the medium term deficit is not addressed.

- 4.4 Officers have embarked on an efficiency review as agreed by Cabinet. Early indications are promising and it is likely that the majority of the funding gap can be eliminated via this route, with the draw against reserves being reduced to just £6m over the 5 year planning period.

Recovery Groups

- 4.5 As part of the approved Governance arrangements the following four recovery groups have been established to have oversight of the delivery of the recovery action plans:

Housing and Community Recovery Group

- Cabinet Members: Cllrs Roy Briscoe and Alan Sutton
- Supporting Members: Cllrs Tracie Bangert, Kevin Hughes, Henry Potter and Norma Graves
- Lead Director: Mrs Louise Rudziak

Economic Recovery Group

- Cabinet Members: Cllrs Tony Dignum and Alan Sutton
- Supporting Members: Cllrs Heather Barrie, Gordon McAra, Graeme Barrett and Richard Plowman
- Lead Director: Mrs Jane Hotchkiss

Planning, Health and Environmental Protection Recovery Group

- Cabinet Members: Cllrs Susan Taylor and Penny Plant
- Supporting Members: Cllrs Carol Purnell, Simon Oakley, Jonathan Brown and Sarah Sharpe
- Lead Director: Mr Andrew Frost

Organisational Recovery Group

- Cabinet Member: Cllr Peter Wilding
- Supporting Members: Cllrs Timothy Johnson and Chris Page
- Lead Director: Mr John Ward

- 4.6 The Leader, Chief Executive and the Director of Corporate Services provide oversight of the four groups, monitor progress and co-ordinate resources.

Progress to Date

- 4.7 Progress on the action plans is detailed in appendices 1-4. Some milestones have been amended to reflect additional work undertaken. Below is a summary of the key achievements to date, new work that has been added since the plans were approved and any significant changes to key milestones.

Housing and Community (Appendix 1)

Key Achievements:

- £37m in Business Rate grants paid out to support businesses

- £237k paid out in the first 6 months of this financial year through Hardship Fund payments to support individuals with their Council Tax who have been financially affected due to Covid-19
- Successful joint bid with Stone Pillow to the Next Steps fund to support Rough Sleepers both in the short and longer term
- Set up a £250k Community Recovery Grant fund

New Work

- Set up the administration of the new Government Test and Trace support payments system to give financial support to people on low income who are required to self isolate. Set up was completed before the required deadline.
- Local Restriction Grant for businesses in the event of the local lockdown.

Changes to key Milestones

- Amendments to the Homelessness Prevention Fund were intended to go to November 2020 Cabinet but have been delayed until December 2020 Cabinet to ensure the fund criteria dovetails with our Discretionary Housing Fund.

Economic (Appendix 2)

Key Achievements

- The design for the St James Industrial Estate refurbishment and redevelopment has been submitted for planning and the specification for the works has been completed and is out to tender.
- The occupancy levels at the Enterprise Centre are currently the highest they have achieved with 100% of the workshops occupied and 85% of the office space let. The operator is receiving enquiries from a number of London based firms regarding relocation.
- The joint marketing for the Ravenna Point industrial units has now ceased as all of the units are currently under offer.
- The Economic Development team have been successful in securing further pooled business rates funding, £80,000, to support the high street with a new training and support for the independent retailers. The new programme will be launched in February following the procurement of a trainer provider. The current online training will continue to be offered during October and November to assist in making the most of any opportunities in the pre – Christmas period linked to the Christmas campaign to support local, shop local.
- The service level agreement for Visit Chichester has been produced and Visit Chichester is getting ready to launch their new brand in Mid-November, they have delayed the launch of their new website to coordinate with this.
- The museum opened to the public on the 28 July 2020 with a number of Covid –19 safety measures and so far this financial year has secured £40,000 of grants.
- The service has set up a £250k Economic Recovery grant and has started to distribute the funding.

Changes to key Milestones

- Visit Chichester have delayed the launch of their new website to link with the launch of their new brand, The Great Sussex Way, target date was September 2020 now November 2020
- An additional update report and risk register for the Southern Gateway project was presented and discussed at Cabinet 8th September 2020.

Planning, Health and Environmental Protection (Appendix 3)

Key Achievements

- In relation to actions to support development viability and hence support economic recovery, officers have implemented changes to the CIL Regulations and have updated our CIL guidance and processes, including the website, to allow for increased flexibility and phasing for small and medium sized developers to make CIL payments due.
- In relation to making the planning process more responsive and effective; officers have completed the review of our local validation list, which was agreed by the Planning Committee at its September 2020 meeting. Officers have also completed an initial review of the Pre Planning Application Advice scheme which was discussed with the Recovery Group on 12 October 2020. Both the Climate Change Action Plan and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans are currently the subject of public consultation following its approval by Cabinet.

Additional Work

- The Health Protection team is heavily involved in Covid activities which have significantly increased workloads.

Changes to key Milestones

- A number of milestones have been added or adjusted mainly to show the scope of individual actions and detailed work undertaken on them.

Organisational (Appendix 4)

Key Achievements

- Efficiency review nearing completion with significant savings being identified, including additional income.
- Priorities for channel shift have been agreed
- On-going ICT support has enabled us to switch back to WFH seamlessly.

Changes to key Milestones

- Milestones for East Pallant House review has been delayed to next year due to current restrictions, and the fact that this particular work stream is not urgent, but will be developed during 2021.
- Consideration of centralisation of administrative functions to be revisited after efficiency review actions completed.

Efficiency Review and Future Services Framework

- 4.8 The efficiency review is underway and the Divisional Managers have put forward a range of efficiency savings, income generation and policy options, which are currently being assessed by SLT. The majority of suggestions will not require Cabinet or Council decisions as these can be made under officer delegations. However, where there is a change to Council policy or the decision does not accord with the Council's Financial Strategy then the proposal will require Cabinet or Council approval. A report setting out the proposed efficiencies will be presented to OSC in November before being considered by Cabinet in December.
- 4.9 Due to the good progress being made it is expected that most if not all of the predicted budget deficit will be covered by these efficiency/income generating ideas meaning that the Council should be able to continue to protect its front line services.
- 4.10 The final stage of the post recovery process is the Future Service Framework which is intended to be a mechanism for prioritising the Council's non-statutory services. Work on this framework is in the early stages as officers are occupied on concluding the efficiency review and further updates will be provided in the next quarterly report to OSC.

5. Outcomes to be Achieved

- 5.1 A short term focussed recovery action plan, with targeted interventions, that is agile and helps supports communities, businesses and the Council's services recover from the impact of C19.
- 5.2 A new Future Service Framework template to establish priority services to be delivered in the future, and return the Council's finances to having a balanced budget over the medium term.

6. Proposal

- 6.1 That the Committee discuss the progress to date on the recovery plans, as set out in appendices 1-4, and make any comments on progress to Cabinet.

7. Alternatives Considered

- 7.1 This is a progress report so not relevant for this report.

8. Resource and Legal Implications

- 8.1 An update on the latest financial position is set out in section 4.

9. Consultation

- 9.1 Recovery Groups, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

10. Community Impact and Corporate Risks

- 10.1 The future remains very uncertain and this uncertainty has increased in recent weeks as Covid 19 cases continue to increase. The Council recently has acquired a number of new responsibilities where officers have had to react quickly to ensure that they are in place by the required timescales. It is important that the Council continues to

remains flexible to adapt to these very challenging time. The Chief Executive leads an Emergency Management Team, which continues to plan for Covid, Brexit and other winter pressures to ensure resources are reallocated as and when required so that key services are delivered to the community.

11. Other Implications

There is likely to be a number of implications arising from the proposed actions in the Recovery Plan. Each action will be assessed individually and where necessary mitigations will be put in place.

12. Appendices

Appendix 1 Housing and Communities Recovery Action Plan

Appendix 2 Economic Recovery Action Plan

Appendix 3 Planning, Health and Environmental Protection Action Recovery Plan

Appendix 4 Organisational Recovery Action Plan

13. Background Papers

None