

TITLE	WBC Recovery Strategy
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 24 June 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Leader of the Council - John Halsall

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To provide a strategy for the Council that addresses the key issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and attends to 'recovery' in the context of delivering the Corporate Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive approve the Wokingham Borough Council Recovery Strategy and note the challenges of recovery in a changing landscape and the need to be agile in our approach.

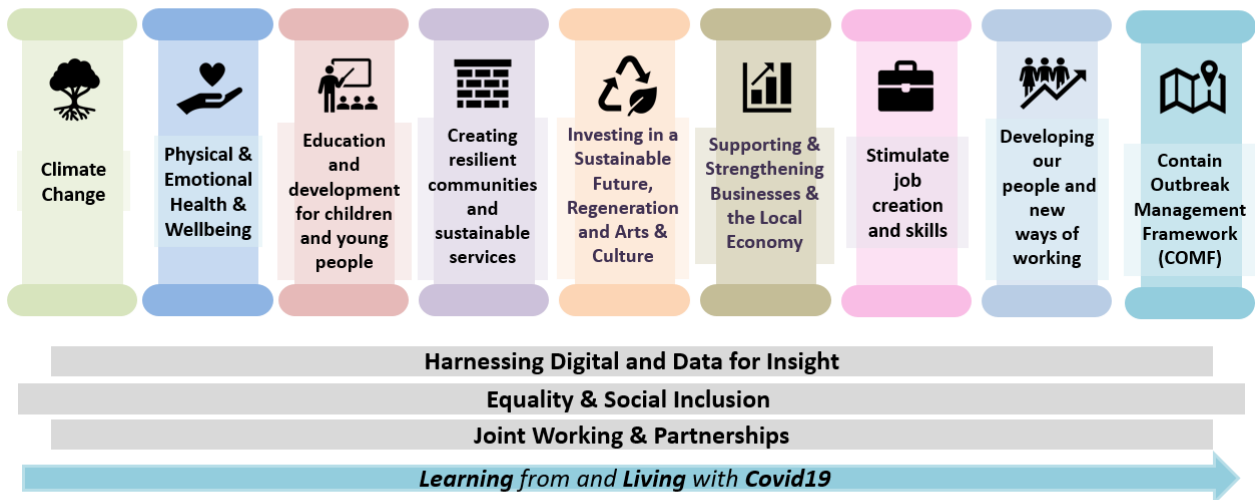
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has been much more than a health crisis. It has come at a high cost to our economy and communities and put an unprecedented strain on our services. Over the last year many of our services have been focused on the response to the pandemic in order to contain the virus and address the immediate impacts this had on society and the economy. As we approach a relaxation of lockdown restriction and increased vaccine rollouts there can be no return to "normal"; we must adapt and learn from the experiences of the last year and seize opportunities for recovery and re-orientation for our borough.

We will view each of our nine pillars of recovery through the lens of three key principles; data, equality and partnerships. We will use data and insight to inform our direction and harness technology to maximise opportunities for recovery. We will actively champion our commitment to diversity, equality and inclusion through our recovery work. Finally, we will deliver on our recovery ambitions jointly with our partners, build on existing networks and continue to strengthen those arrangements that have been set up during the response phase.

We have placed an additional emphasis on learning from and living with COVID-19. Although a significant proportion of adults have been vaccinated there are gaps in our vaccinated population and the threat of emerging variants pose the risk that we will be living with COVID-19 for many years to come; our approach to containing the virus is therefore an integral part of our planning. An additional consideration across each pillar is that we have learnt a great deal over the last year and wherever possible we will strive to use our learnings in our recovery approach.

Pillars for Recovery



This strategy is intended to:

- Provide assurances that activity has been reviewed through the lens of COVID-19
- Ensure each key theme impacted by COVID-19 is properly addressed through the pillars
- Capture a snapshot of one version of recovery activity across the organisation and signpost to recovery activity within existing strategies and groups
- Enable development of a central reporting mechanism for recovery activity

The timescale of this report is currently 5 years. This strategy is a working document and will continuously be reviewed and adapted as the recovery landscape we work in is constantly shifting.

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact globally, nationally and locally here in Wokingham. We have all faced challenges presented by the pandemic, whether they be social and physical impacts of lockdown restrictions, financial challenges or the emotional impacts of losing loved ones and living through incredibly turbulent and uncertain times. Like the rest of the world, we have paid a heavy price; as of 16th April 2021, 8,186 COVID cases have been detected in Wokingham and sadly we estimate that around 300 residents have tragically lost their lives since the start of the pandemic in 2020.

The demands and pressures from the pandemic have been felt within the organisation as well as by our partners, local businesses and residents. These challenges will continue to evolve as case rates fall and the wider impacts of COVID-19 come into focus for example inequalities, deteriorating emotional health and impacts of an economic recession.

However, despite the challenges, people and communities have rallied together to offer support to each other during a time of crisis. In addition, there have been inadvertent positives to emerge from the pandemic. For example, we have seen the environmental benefits of increased remote working, unique and innovative models of service delivery and increased partnership working which has strengthened local and regional networks.

In many ways COVID-19 has reshaped life as we know it and the world will emerge from this pandemic being very different economically and socially. Organisations are harnessing data & insights from the pandemic to shape and embrace a 'new normal'. This has provided us with a unique chance to rethink, reshape and re-orientate the way we work and the services we deliver to seize the opportunities which have arisen during the pandemic.

We have approached the pandemic in three phases; response, recovery and re-orientation.

Response - Taking action that has an immediate impact and addresses issues as they arise to create innovative services at the point of use

Recovery - Making services robust and well-adapted as we move out of lockdown. Aims to create stability while bolstering support to residents and the local economy so they can return to normal

Re-Orientation - Ambitious, transformational and broad-reaching in scope. Anticipating what the future will look like, implementing preventative measures and shock-proofing our services

The scope of the Recovery Strategy brings together the recovery and re-orientation phases.

BUSINESS CASE

The Recovery Strategy builds on the vision and priorities expressed in the Community Vision and Corporate Delivery Plan and will support us to achieve our ambitions to make Wokingham '*A great place to live, learn, work & grow and a great place to do business*'.

The strategy sets out nine pillars of recovery which will address short, medium and long-term actions we are taking towards recovery and re-orientation of the borough. We will work with our partners to tackle these pillars of activity.

The strategy describes immediate actions we are taking towards recovery as an organisation through the next year. It goes on to set up actions for a sustainable recovery over 2-4 years. Finally, it touches on work we are doing towards our longer term ambitions, 5 years and beyond, to re-orientate the borough and longer term transformation.

The nine pillars of recovery are:

- 1) Climate change
Tackling climate change and laying the foundations for a sustainable, clean and green future for our borough.
- 2) Physical & Emotional Health & Wellbeing
Promoting the physical and emotional health and wellbeing of our residents and targeting action to support our most vulnerable communities.
Containing the spread of COVID-19.
- 3) Education and development for children & young people
Tackling the impacts of lockdown restrictions on childhood development and education to ensure all children and young people have opportunities to be successful.
- 4) Creating resilient communities & sustainable services
Creating strong and resilient communities. Thinking creatively about managing increasing demand for frontline service delivery.
- 5) Investing in a Sustainable Future, Regeneration and Arts & Culture
Invest in the regeneration of local areas, support housing growth, digital infrastructure, sustainable transport and reviving arts and culture in the borough
- 6) Supporting & Strengthening Businesses & the Local Economy
Cultivating a business-friendly environment in order to sustain a strong economic recovery.
- 7) Stimulate job creation & skills
Work with our partners to support people through skills and learning to get back into employment.
- 8) Developing our people & new ways of working
Promote staff health & wellbeing.
Aligning our ways of working to the vision set out as part of the Workforce Re-imagination programme.
- 9) Contain Outbreak Management Framework
The Contain Outbreak Management Framework sets out how local and regional partners should continue to work with each other, in their communities, to prevent, manage and contain outbreaks of COVID-19. This is a temporary pillar and its activity will be absorbed into other pillars over the life of the recovery strategy.

We will view each of our nine pillars through the lens of three key principles:

- 1) Harnessing the power of digital, data & insight
 - Realising our ambitions to be an insight led council by utilising data & insight to inform decision making and strategic thinking to enhance performance. We will harness digital opportunities, technology and innovation wherever possible to deliver better outcomes for our residents.

- 2) Equality, fairness and social inclusion
 - Actively champion our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion through our recovery work to tackle inequality together. Our vision is to be a great place to live, learn, work, and grow and a great place to do business and this includes everyone. There is no place for discrimination in any society.

- 3) Joint working and partnerships
 - We will build on existing networks and create new connections with partners across sectors to jointly work on recovery and maximise opportunities for positive and long-lasting change.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Funding will be in line with the MTFP	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Funding will be in line with the MTFP	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Funding will be in line with the MTFP	N/A	N/A

Other Financial Information
Financial impacts of recovery are considered as part of the Council’s budget setting process through the MTFP. Where requirement for additional resource is identified through specific projects this will be addressed through the budget setting process

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
Internal

Public Sector Equality Duty
Due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken. Equality is an overarching principle of recovery and will be addressed as part of the work carried out against each of the eight pillars of recovery. An initial equality impact assessment has been carried out and is included in the appendices

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

The approval of this strategy would have a positive impact on the Council's carbon neutral objective by directly addressing climate change as a key action within the strategy.

List of Background Papers

Wokingham Borough Council Recovery Strategy
Equality Impact Assessment

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