

Public
Key Decision - No

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Recovery planning for Huntingdonshire: the impact of Covid-19

Meeting/Date: Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) – 8th July 2020

Executive Portfolio: Executive Leader, Councillor R Fuller

Report by: Managing Director

Wards affected: All

Executive Summary:

The onset of the global pandemic does have significant local impacts and whilst up until now the focus has been on responding to the immediate consequences, we have for a while begun starting to shift focus to the longer term requirements of recovery. This report presents the initial conclusions of research into understanding the impact of Covid within our communities and our place. It is the starting point for recovery planning and creates a baseline against which the recovery can be mapped.

The impact assessment is a living document, and as such does have gaps since data is not always available in real time; it will be maintained as a working document for as long as it has value.

Recommendation(s):

1. Overview and Scrutiny accept the impact assessment as a comprehensive summary of the impacts of Covid-19 on Huntingdonshire.
2. Overview and Scrutiny are asked to support the construction of recovery plans based on the themes of:
 - Economy
 - Environment
 - Social
 - Community

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The impacts, both direct and indirect, of Covid-19 are wide ranging and we should seek to understand what has happened before we formalise any plans for recovery. The Community Impact Assessment(App1) sets out what we know but also looks at the issues that need further research. The assessment is the starting point for the planning of recovery but it is by no means the end point, as new evidence will emerge over coming weeks and months. Recovery will be a long term commitment, which will involve all parts of the community: local people; businesses and employers; voluntary sector agencies; local volunteers; other public agencies and national government; and, every person attached to the council, Members and officers alike.
- 1.2 Everyone will have a part to play and the recovery plan will involve engagement with stakeholders. The aim is to prepare for a sustainable recovery plan which will reflect the unique strengths and opportunities faced by Huntingdonshire; and will reflect the needs of the people and place and the role of elected Members will be central to ensuring that the plans are grounded in the reality of our communities.
- 1.3 Covid-19 has reset the boundaries for how local government operates within the wider public sector system. For our communities it has caused reflection on what is important and for our business community it is likely to result in seismic change, particularly in who exists and how they operate. The pandemic has hit different parts of our geography differently and communities, and their residents, who were already deemed to be disadvantaged have according to the evidence experienced a greater impact.
- 1.4 There have been extraordinary changes in how the council operates, in how our residents interact with the council, often resulting in things that we have spent many years aspiring to deliver in policies and plans having now been achieved in just a few months. The opportunity exists to ensure some of these positive changes endure for the longer term. Finally, if we do not plan, then the already skewed impact of the pandemic will become hard wired into the community and the opportunities for a strong response will be lost.

2. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS

- 2.1 As individual organisations the public services in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will be setting ambitions and making plans for individual agency recovery, based on local need. Local plans will need to have regard to these and ensure that the maximum benefit accrues to local communities.

- 2.2 The disruption caused by Covid-19 has been unprecedented. The economic impacts are set to be considerable, with many commentators suggesting that the recovery will need to be thought of in terms of years. The social impacts have not fallen equally across our communities and the evidence is indicating that there is a likelihood that the most obvious impact will be to increase the underlying inequalities that predated the pandemic, whether they relate to personal circumstances or access to opportunity. The evidence demonstrating the profile of impact is set out in App 1. The challenge for recovery is to balance the response to the immediate situation but to also allow for any subsequent waves of potentially both infections, and of any second order consequences.
- 2.3 The Council's finances have been impacted both in terms of additional costs incurred and income foregone, and these factors will be included in recovery plans. However, the predicted demand patterns suggest that with unemployment rates likely to be increasing, demand will rise across all safeguarding services, housing, benefits, and some emergency services and this type of more detailed demand analysis will be considered as part of the recovery plans which will emerge.
- 2.4 The need for robust recovery plans means that the normal cycle of a discrete Corporate Plan will be replaced by a combined plan which will set out the Council's ambitions, and strategy to respond to the impacts of Covid in a single document. The likely timescale is to aim for a draft proposal for the autumn, subject to no local outbreaks during the summer months.
- 2.5 The recovery plans are built for Huntingdonshire by the council will be part of a wider system involving other stakeholders and the ambition is not to focus recovery as a series of silos or organisations but to collectively work toward desired outcomes, though the development of a better integrated system based on the principles of common purpose, learning the lessons from the last 3 months and the understanding that our current policies and strategies may need to be revisited.
- 2.6 All of this implies risks; we are coming out of a period of managing risks of an unknown nature and we will continue to respond proportionately as we move into a period of new opportunity. A clear evidence base of the sort presented here will be instrumental in enabling us to quantify and appropriately manage this risk.

3. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS

3.1 The risks surrounding the pandemic have been monitored and managed throughout the response phase; as recovery comes to the fore a separate review of risks will be undertaken and managed accordingly.

4. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 The endorsement of the impact assessment will allow the formal planning process to begin based on the four main themes outlined in the report. The timescale will depend on the communities' exposure to further waves of Covid-19 but the target is to have a draft ready for consultation during the autumn

5. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

5.1 The proposal is for a single plan to be prepared which captures both the objectives of the Corporate Plan and the recovery activity.

6. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

6.1 The Council's response to the pandemic will set out the ambitions for Huntingdonshire over the coming years. It will be based on analysis of evidence and the Community Impact Assessment marks the first stage in that process.

7. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 – Community Impact Assessment

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