

CABINET

DATE OF MEETING: 7 JANUARY 2021

TITLE OF REPORT: NEXT STEPS IN COVID-19 RECOVERY

Report of: Joint Chief Executive

Cabinet Member: Leader of the Council

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report provides an update on the Council's work to support the recovery phase since the last report in October, in response to the outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19).

1.2 It is important to note that the situation remains live as the pandemic continues.

2 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 That Cabinet:

- Notes the updates on the Recovery Plan as outlined in Appendix 1
- Agrees a solution for the resourcing shortage

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 Cabinet approved the Council's Recovery Plans in October. At the beginning of November (5th), England began its second lockdown. During the month-long lockdown, resources were reallocated to coordinate the Council's response. Despite the resource implications, work has progressed on many of the key actions over the last the two months.

4 PROGRESS ON RECOVERY

4.1 The Recovery Plan is based around the following key five workstreams;

Community Recovery
Economic Recovery
Financial Recovery (internal)
Reallocation of Road Space
Revitalise Hart (internal)

4.2 Each workstream has a number of actions. Appendix 1 provides an update on the progress of each of the actions in relation to timeframes indicated in October.

4.3 Appendix 1 identifies that the majority of actions remain on track, with a number now completed including:

- Procurement of a study on Economic Recovery from Covid-19 – This study is being used to inform and guide the Council’s response to ensure the District’s economy recovers.
- Collation of key business and employment statistics – This data has facilitated the creation and publication of Economic Dashboard updated monthly with key statistics to aid decision making.
- Establish a programme of engagement with businesses in Hart – The team now provides a weekly e-newsletter issued to participating businesses
- Pedestrianisation of Fleet Road - Fleet Road was pedestrianised over the summer period to facilitate social distancing within the town. The road has now been reopened with on-street parking bays closed to continue to facilitate social distancing.

4.4 Other achievements over the last two months include:

- Awarding 20 grants, totalling over £5,300, to help community and voluntary groups safely restart face-to-face activity, and a further 13 grants to support the community emergency response
- Providing wellbeing stickers and posters to all Hart secondary schools in collaboration with Fleet Phoenix
- Implementing the Hart Community Recovery Working group to drive forward action to support the recovery of Hart’s communities, with a particular focus on those residents most impacted or most at-risk of being impacted by the Coronavirus crisis
- Rebranding the Skills Cafe to the Hart Employment & Skills Hub and promotion of the facility
- Supporting Hart Foodbank to reach out to all schools to encourage more to register as referral agencies and promote the support available to families
- Work is also underway to create a campaign aimed at people aged 18 to 30 who live in the Hart district. The campaign will let people know what support is available to help them find a way forward through the challenges they are experiencing as a result of the pandemic. Bringing on board some younger volunteers (aged 18-30) to help shape the campaign.

4.5 The Council is also progressing with the Revitalise Hart workstream, achieving a number of key milestones including an all staff roll-out of laptops, new covid-compliant workspace and in the New Year, an Employee Assistant Programme.

5 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCING IMPACT

5.1 Recovery activity now forms the major phase of the Councils activity on Covid-19 and this is reflected in the updated Service Plans that were agreed by Cabinet in July 2020. Whilst a small budget of £30,000 was approved to aid recovery processes it is key to note that with the gradual lifting of lockdown, public and political expectations regarding a return to ‘business as

usual' service delivery means that resource availability for recovery is significantly impacted.

5.2 In October, the following options were identified to 'bridge the financial gap' to resource the Council's Recovery Plan:

- Recruitment to full establishment (the Council normally carries a range of vacancies).
- Use of the Business Rates Reserve to fund activity specifically aimed to help protect the council's business rates base. Since the implementation of Business Rates retention scheme as the primary funder of Local Government, Hart District Council has safeguarded funds above budget and placed them in a Business Rates reserve, to be used in future to years safeguarding years of very low business rates being paid or be used to encourage inward investment and protect our existing business rates base. We have not, to date, used the Business Rates Reserve for this latter purpose and it comes with its own risks, but the corollary of not using it, does potentially present a greater risk to the economy of the district and future income through business rates.
- Recruitment of apprentices to provide capacity in the system. Apprentices can be any age but must be on accredited apprenticeship training. The Apprenticeship Levy is a levy on UK employers to fund new apprenticeships. In England, control of apprenticeship funding is put in the hands of employers through the Digital Apprenticeship Service. The levy is charged at a rate of 0.5% of an employer's pay bill. The contribution is compulsory but can be used to fund our own apprenticeships. Our contribution is placed in our apprenticeship service account which we can use to pay for apprenticeship training, assessment and wages for apprenticeships up to the minimum wage. Any additional payments will need to be covered by the Local Authority. Hart District Council has a budget in place to provide the relevant top up to living wage if up to four apprentices are taken on.
- Recruitment of 'kick start' placements – 'kick start' is a scheme announced during the Covid pandemic to help 16-24 year olds who are unemployed on Universal Credit gain workplace skills and experience. Each 'kick start' role must be a new job and not replace or put staff out of work. The government will pay 25 hours per week minimum wage, with placements starting as early as November 2020 and continuing until December 2021. We can access this scheme by working through Hampshire Chamber of Commerce who have established themselves as an intermediary for this scheme.

5.3 Since October, the Council has progressed the appointment of three apprentices (one apprentice for each of the following services: Place, Community and Tech Services), to join in the new year.

- 5.4 Unfortunately delays in the implementation of the government's kick start scheme has meant that this option will not provide resource at pace with the Recovery Plan and whilst the Council has begun to recruit to full establishment, there will be a lag to provide all the required resource when its required in early 2021 to achieve the current timeframes.
- 5.5 With regards to the use of the Business Rates Reserve, the additional lockdown in November resulted in changing guidance from central government and consequently, the use of the reserve to balance the collection fund (which is what it was originally put in place for).
- 5.6 Given these issues, we need to re-evaluate the current timeframes associated with the Recovery Plan. The options available are:
- Extend the delivery dates of activities. This option provides the most flexibility and resilience for the Recovery Plan. Given the dynamic nature of the pandemic and its associated impact on Council resources, extending the existing timetable will enable to the Council to allocate resources accordingly.
 - Direct existing resource to the most critical activities across the workstreams and remove other activities from the Recovery Plan. Whilst this option would protect key activities, it would be at the expense of other activities, all of which have been identified to collectively support the recovery phase.
 - Back-fill existing roles with agency staff (at an additional cost to the Council). Whilst the most expensive of the options, using agency staff could be beneficial to some service currently experiencing staffing gaps. This option would need to be comprehensively reviewed across all services.
- 5.7 The first two options do not have financial implications but the third option will. Of the £30k Recovery Budget allocated, £25k remains. This could, in part, fund agency staff to back-fill existing roles.

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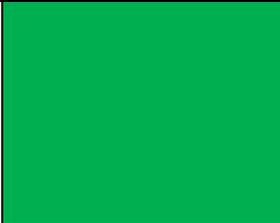
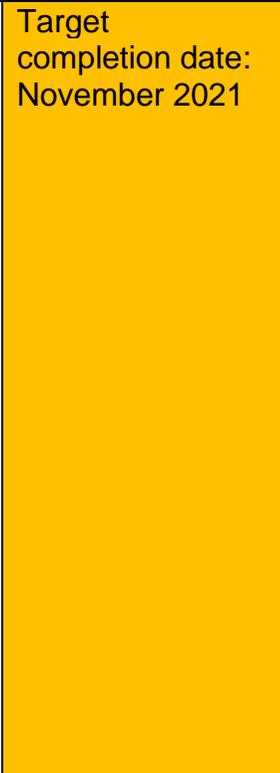
APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Recovery Plan

Appendix 1 – Recovery Plan – Workstream Action Plans

Community Recovery				
Activity	Expected Outcome	Update	Next Steps	RAG
Local insight and evidence of need: Bring together hard data and local intelligence to maintain an up-to-date picture of the need and impacts (including socioeconomic and wellbeing) within communities, to inform our community recovery priorities	<p>The Council and our partners will have a good understanding of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities or specific groups within communities most negatively impacted by the COVID-19 situation or most ‘at-risk’ of negative impact • Trends over time in wellbeing including socio-economic wellbeing <p>Where/how to focus our resources to help those most in need and address disproportionate impacts on specific groups</p>	Baseline insight collated and presented to key partner forums including Hart Health & Wellbeing Partnership	To present the insight in the form of a simple dashboard which can be updated quarterly	Establish baseline picture by November 2020 and regularly update until November 2021
Communication and signposting: Establish a communications framework/plan and coordinate with partners to cascade messages to residents about how they can stay well (over and above specific COVID-19 guidance), and signpost residents to available support including psychological, financial, employment, housing and wider wellbeing	Residents are supported to take steps to keep themselves well and know what services can support them if needed	<p>Supporting messaging around mental health & wellbeing and support during the festive season</p> <p>Winter wellbeing messages through social media and parish newsletters</p>	To launch the 18-30 campaign January 2021	Target completion date: November 2021

		Hart Community Recovery Working Group has agreed a communications approach document and is working on targeted campaign for younger adults aged 18-30		
<p>Voluntary and community sector capacity: Enhance and promote support for the voluntary and community sector, such as to enable community activity to restart safely and to sustain or build upon community activity established in response to COVID-19 where appropriate</p>	<p>Resilience and capacity of voluntary and community sector Community activity restarts safely resulting in improved wellbeing and a reduction in loneliness and isolation in communities</p>	<p>20 grants awarded to support voluntary & community sector activity to restart safely – grant applications have dropped off since second lockdown</p> <p>Safely Back to Public spaces training supported for managers of community and village halls</p>	<p>Remit of community grant pot will be broadened to support voluntary services who provide support for people with long term conditions including Clinically Extremely Vulnerable population e.g. befriending</p>	<p>Target completion date: June 2021</p>
<p>Addressing local inequalities: Use the insight gathered in action 1 to develop and deliver a small number of targeted initiatives to</p>	<p>Support is available to those most in need of it and there is a reduction in inequalities within the district. The council</p>	<p>Initial focus will be on 18-30 year olds</p> <p>In discussion with</p>	<p>Continue to engage Primary Care Networks to agree local</p>	<p>Target completion date: September 2021</p>

<p>address the impacts on specific geographies or groups most affected by the COVID-19 situation</p>	<p>has enhanced relationships with specific communities/population groups</p>	<p>3 of the 4 NHS Primary Care Networks in Hart around addressing local inequalities</p>	<p>priorities and actions</p>	
<p>Making it easier to access support and services: Make it easier for residents to access the support they need, when they need it, by enabling more residents to use digital technology and exploring opportunities for the council to collaborate with other community services to have a stronger physical presence in communities, such as through co-location in community hubs</p>	<p>Residents can more easily access services and support including through digital technology. Increasing digital inclusion also resulting in more residents being able to connect with friends, family and the wider community through digital channels</p>	<p>Connected Fleet Lions Club computer refurbishment project with local voluntary service supporting over 60s. They will roll out a project in Spring to provide netbooks to help digitally excluded members get online.</p> <p>Community hubs – initial discussion with Revitalise Hart office of the future workstream lead</p>	<p>Community hubs - explore options for medium term solutions (for development in 2021/22) and engage key partners</p>	<p>Target completion date: November 2021</p> 

Economic Recovery				
Activity	Expected Outcome	Update	Next Steps	RAG
1. Procurement of a study on Economic Recovery from Covid-19	Report to set out what actions Hart can take to ensure the Districts economy recovers from the various impacts resulting from Covid-19	Now applying the recommendations in other workstreams	N/A	Completed
2. Collation of key business and employment statistics	To ensure that the Council has up to date relevant data to inform its decisions and actions in relation to economic recovery	Creation and publication of Economic Dashboard updated monthly with key statistics	To maintain updates	Completed To be incorporated into BAU
3a. Prepare and launch new Hart for Business website	To promote Hart District as a location for business re-location and growth.	Website content updated and checked for accessibility	Resolve privacy notice and other matters prior to launch	Target completion date: March 2021
3b. Promotion of Hart District as a place to work/live/visit	High quality promotional material in various formats (video; adverts; leaflets/guides; phone app etc) to promote attract companies/people to the District	Initial discussions have taken place	To continue to develop ideas and appropriate materials to use and determine resources required	Target completion date: May 2021
4. Establish a programme of engagement with businesses in Hart	To have a better understanding on how businesses (large and small) have been impacted by COVID-19 and what their short/medium/long terms plans are (also considering Brexit) and how can Hart	Weekly e-newsletter issued to those that have signed up Have sourced data from Business rates to create lists of top companies to target	Continue with weekly e-newsletter Business leaflet to be issued with business rates requests during mid Feb	Completed To be incorporated into BAU

	assist		Engagement to take place in 2021	
5. Establish a central database of businesses operating in Hart and a business premises directory	To have an up to date business database of who operates and where in the District. To include properties available to rent/purchase for companies wishing to grow/relocate	In the process of purchasing Inter-departmental business register data from ONS that will provide a detailed breakdown of the nature of businesses operating in the District The existing links on the business support page of the Council's website will continue to sign post to commercial agents with relevant data	To continue to collate business data, this will provide up to date information to inform which businesses to target and to be able to monitor a dynamic situation. To continue to liaise with commercial agents.	Target completion date: February 2021 To be incorporated into BAU
6. Widen scope of existing employment and skills advice to support the rise in unemployment and lack of employment opportunities	To ensure that Hart can offer as much support as possible to those looking for work and training	Hart Employment Hub – key online resource for employment and training opportunities Social media comms plan active to promote funding and training opportunities North Hants Youth Hub bid for funding	Continue to promote opportunities as they become available Awaiting outcome of DWP funding bid for	Target completion date: April 2021 To be incorporated into BAU

		<p>(DWP) in progress to target support to 16-24 yr olds (youth coaches, workshops etc)</p> <p>Virtual job club being created to target experienced professionals now out of work with guest speakers and specialist advice</p>	<p>North Hants Youth Hub (joint project with Rushmoor and Basingstoke)</p> <p>Virtual job club to be launched Feb 21</p>	
7. Preparation of Town Centre Strategies/Action Plans	To promote town/village centre activity to ensure footfall continues and grows and existing enterprises thrive and new ones are created	We have written to the Town and Parish Councils for Fleet, Yateley, Blackwater, Hook, Hartley Wintney and Odiham to assess any interest in preparing an action plan/strategy	<p>Awaiting responses to enquiries – deadline end of Jan 21 to decide a way forward</p> <p>Will then determine any interest and next steps</p>	Target completion date: December 2021

Reallocating Road Space in Response to COVID-19					
Activity:		Expected Outcome	Update	Next Steps	RAG
Fleet Town Centre - Pedestrianisation of Fleet Road		To expand/enhance 'safe space' within the centre to facilitate social distancing To increase outdoor space for shops, cafes and restaurants to enable social distancing Provide safe space within the centre to hold markets, events and other outdoor activities, which will increase the attractiveness of the centre To increase consumer confidence in the centre	Fleet Road was pedestrianised over the summer period to facilitate social distancing within the town. The road has now been reopened with on-street parking bays closed to continue to facilitate social distancing.	None	Completed
Enhancing pedestrian and cycle provision	Enhanced cycling provision between Fleet Railway Station and Fleet Town Centre	To enhance the existing cycling lane on Fleet Road between Fleet Railway Station and Fleet Town Centre in order to promote cycling along this key transport corridor and facilitate social distancing	The Council is working with HCC to take a more strategic approach to improve cycling routes across the district, including this route. This work has now been incorporated into the Council's Green Grid project.	Workstream has been incorporated into the Council's Green Grid project.	Incorporated into BAU
	Safe routes to school	To identify improvements to existing routes to school to promote walking and cycling and facilitate social	The Council is working with HCC to improve existing and create new walking/cycling routes to	Workstream has been incorporated into the Council's Green Grid	Incorporated into BAU

		distancing	school – This work has now been incorporated into the Council’s Green Grid project.	project.	
	Key routes across the district	To identify improvements to existing routes to promote walking and cycling and facilitate social distancing	The Council is working with HCC to improve existing and create new walking/cycling routes within the district – This work has now been incorporated into the Council’s Green Grid project.	Workstream has been incorporated into the Council’s Green Grid project.	Incorporated into BAU

Revitalise Hart				
Activity	Expected Outcome	Update	Next Steps	RAG
HR & Wellbeing - Update and add new policy and procedure documents. Including looking into flexible and agile working.	To bring our policy's up-to-date and reflect the 'new normal'	Agile working policy drafted and review of other policies ongoing.	Policy review, discussion and consultation.	Target completion date: December 2021
HR & Wellbeing – Introduce an employee assistance programme. Training for managers on how to deal with change, supporting staff remotely. Remote working training ect	To make sure all staff, managers and HOS are offered the right training to help them transition in to the 'new normal', and have the right support to make this a success	Employee Assistance Programme procured	Launch January 2021	Target completion date: April 2021
HR & Wellbeing – To make sure we have a clear communication plan for staff and councillors. To make sure key conversations are being had in 121s on what to expect and support is offered and reasonable adjustments are made and DSE carried out.	To make sure staff and councillors are update with changes within the organisation.	DSEs have been carried out with additional equipment provided to staff on request.	Member DSE assessments	Target completion date: Ongoing
Digital & IT - Telephony replacement	Develop a unified communication platform to provide a cloud-based solution for phone, video and chat capability on any device at any location	Extend current shared service Mitel telephony platform to include homeworker licences enhancements	Planning, configuration and testing to be scheduled in January 2021 for launch by April	Target completion date: April 2021
Digital & IT - Website review	Review the current website for user experience, content and functionality. Evaluate hosting and support relationship with	Draft business case and scoping has commenced	SLT to review business case Jan 2021	Target completion date: December 2021

	current provider and re-render. Include migration from Drupal 7 to new platform			
Digital & IT - Accessibility regulations	Test the site to ensure that it meets new accessibility regulations. Embed a new monitoring culture with content editors. Review role of content editors and editorial process across site	Initial review carried out but ongoing review required.	Ongoing review	Target completion date: December 2020
Digital & IT - modern.gov implementation	Replace the existing manual process in Committee Services for issuing agendas, reports and minutes with a fully configured web-based report management system	Phase 1 – papers now available through restricted app and being tested and trialled by some Members	Implementation across all Members and staff.	Target completion date: December 2020
Digital & IT - Office 365 application education incl. SharePoint	Provide refresher SharePoint training programme for members to ensure application is being used correctly and efficiently	Training to be carried out in February 2021	Training to be carried out in February 2021	Target completion date: April 2021
Digital & IT - Self-service portal review	Review the different customer journeys through each portal from the website and investigate how the Council can consolidate and/or improve	Work has commenced on reviewing the three authenticated portals. Capital bid made	Business case to be completed setting out aims & objectives	Target completion date: December 2021

	functionality for customers across different services			
Digital & IT - E-signatures	Implement e-signatures across the organisation, starting as a pilot in Housing for agreements and contracts	Housing working with selected suppliers to identify suitable solution	Procurement and Contract agreement.	Target completion date: April 2021
Opportunity for agencies to co-locate in the community building	To investigate the opportunity to deliver a modern flexible co-working hub, which can offer public like-minded organisations a base to work from. Need to consider future running costs and ensure the income exceeds these perceived running costs.	Not yet started	Outcome likely dependent on the work of the cross party Campus Regeneration working group.	Target completion date: December 2021
Promotion of working from home concept	To deliver successful implementation of a flexible working model to improve efficiencies as well as work-life balance across the Council. Additional potential benefits being a reduction of car traffic within close proximity to the Fleet Civic site and a reduction of fixed real estate costs.	Working from home concept successfully implemented. Agile working policy being developed.	Agile working policy to be agreed.	Target completion date: December 2021
Mobilise key Council services	A key target is improving customer engagement and a key part will be ensuring	Not yet started		Target completion date: December 2021

	those residents that face Digital/IT challenges can visit a local centre to seek help/ guidance/support.			
Repurpose the building vs moving	To investigate the opportunity to repurpose the Council offices or to relocate (within the framework of discussions through the Civic Regeneration Project). The building is too large and requires significant reconfiguration to meet current Council demands. Need to balance financial, planning, sustainability and environmental opportunities and constraints.	Early stage work	Ascertain flexible working model concept, translating into size specific requirement of office space. Workplace design can then commence to reconfigure offices	Target completion date: December 2021

