

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO COUNCIL

22 JULY 2020

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

UPDATE ON BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH RESPONSE TO COVID-19

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to introduce a presentation from the Chief Executive on the response to the Covid-19 Pandemic and the steps being taken towards recovery, and to update Members on the approach to recovery, including the establishment of a Cross-Party Recovery Panel.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives/other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:

1. **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focussed on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.
2. **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
3. **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

- 3.1 In response to the global Covid-19 pandemic, on 23 March 2020 the UK Government imposed a nationwide lockdown in an effort to help minimise the spread of coronavirus. The majority of businesses were required to close and others were required to change their working practice.
- 3.2 The Council has undergone significant change over the last four months, often responding urgently to changing circumstances, guidance and regulation. New services have been created, some services stopped, staff redeployed and new working practices put in place including enabling those that can work from home to do so. The focus throughout the last four months has been on the delivery of essential services, in particular those for the most vulnerable in our communities, and seeking to prevent the spread of the virus to save lives. This has required that we have had

to adapt service delivery on a scale and at a pace that is unprecedented. Many of the changes will need to endure beyond this phase of the crisis and potentially become part of the 'new normal' for the Council moving forward.

- 3.3 The speed and severity of the changes to the way in which we could do business required that emergency governance arrangements were put in place in line with the Council's Constitution and Scheme of Delegation of Functions, to allow the Leader and Chief Executive the agility to respond appropriately to urgent, and often critical matters. An emergency Cabinet/Corporate Management Board (CCMB) 'Gold' command meeting was established on a daily basis. This has gradually been stepped down over recent weeks, initially to a twice a week meeting, then to a weekly meeting, and it is anticipated that it will be replaced by 'business as usual' meetings shortly as the lockdown continues to be eased. These meetings were informed by Daily Situation Reports (DSR's) and latterly Weekly Situation Reports (WSR's) from each Directorate setting out key issues and risks and matters for decision. The notes from each meeting and an action log were prepared and retained to ensure proper recording of the decisions that were made, and the context that prevailed at that time. The weekly formal decisions have been circulated throughout this period to Group Leaders and Scrutiny Chairs. Weekly meetings with all of the political group leaders have been held throughout the crisis with the Leader and Chief Executive of the Council, to ensure that Elected Members were kept as informed and involved as possible in the extraordinary circumstances.
- 3.4 In addition, at various frequencies there have been regular meetings of the Leaders and Chief Executives across Wales, together with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and often with Welsh Government Ministers. Similar meetings have happened across professional disciplines including for Section 151 Officers, Monitoring Officers, Directors of Social Services and Directors of Education. Furthermore, regular meetings have been established at all levels with the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board as part of their Gold and Silver command structure, as well as a weekly meeting with the Chair and Chief Executive of the Health Board. These meetings have then been replicated throughout the management teams of all of the Council's Directorates and in the case of Education on a 'Team Bridgend' basis with our Headteachers. Importantly, regular meetings have also been held with trade union representatives.
- 3.5 The response from all of the Council's staff has been exceptional throughout this period, particularly in view of the many significant challenges that we have faced. Many have gone above and beyond what could ordinarily be expected, in order to ensure we continue to deliver essential services effectively. In Social Services, essential front line services continued to be delivered but in different ways and a strong working relationship with BAVO and the third sector was developed and enhanced. Social care, BAVO and the customer contact centre worked together to provide support to shielded individuals. Emergency child care provision was provided in our hubs for children of key workers. These hubs were staffed by school staff who also continued to provide online provision for all pupils. The catering service had to quickly plan and arrange delivery of free school meals. Both in-house and independent residential care have been at the forefront of caring for vulnerable people and have also directly supported and provided care for people who have contracted the virus. Domiciliary care has continued to provide personal care and support for individuals who live in their own homes in the community. The service has also had to embrace the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) which had previously

been under estimated within the care home and domiciliary care sector but will most definitely be part of their everyday future. However, outstanding support has also been apparent in less visible services, for example, in responding rapidly to the distribution of grants to support local businesses in our finance teams, in our customer care, communications and information technology teams, and also in waste and cleaner streets, registrars, cemetery and crematoria, economic development and regeneration, housing, cleaning, property, planning, transport, legal, procurement and shared regulatory service teams. The Council has sought to acknowledge the efforts of all of these teams, including a campaign to celebrate the work of 'unsung heroes' throughout the pandemic.

3.6 The 'One Council' approach has been very apparent over the last four months in the way that every Directorate and service area has supported each other, and also in the way there has been widespread, cross party political support for the measures the Council has had to undertake. This is without doubt one of the reasons for the relative success the Council has had in ensuring continued and effective service delivery for our most vulnerable individuals and communities and minimising the impact of the virus locally.

4. Current situation/proposal

4.1 As we move out of lockdown and the restrictions are eased there are additional challenges that need to be addressed. Some are highlighted below:

- Enhanced support for homeless individuals to protect them the impact of the virus.
- Support for local businesses both in terms of financial support and preparation for when lockdown restrictions have been removed.
- Delivery of the Test, Trace and Protect programme which is crucial to the monitoring and tracking of any positive Covid-19 cases as lockdown measures are eased, to manage and avoid local spikes or a second peak of the virus.
- Support for staff wellbeing recognising the anxiety some staff will undoubtedly feel about a gradual return to 'normal' working arrangements and that the circumstances of the last three months will have been difficult for many.
- Preparation for the restart and return of many services.

4.2 Over recent weeks announcements from the Welsh Government have signaled a gradual easing of the lockdown that had been imposed. This has meant that the Council has had to prepare to restart and adapt a wide range of Council services in the context of extended stringent social distancing requirements. This has been considered in detail by Cabinet at its meeting of 30th June 2020. The Council's approach to recovery planning was also discussed at a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13th July 2020. That Committee accepted the recommendation made by Cabinet that a Cross-Party Recovery Panel be established, to inform, support and challenge the recovery exercise and ensure that Elected Members and key partners have an opportunity to feed into and shape thinking and make recommendations back to Cabinet.

4.3 Members are requested to receive the presentation by the Chief Executive which will outline in more detail the work that has been done since March 2020, and will outline how we move into the recovery phase.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

- 5.1 None directly as a result of this report. Where individual decisions arise from the recovery planning process they will be taken in consideration of the policy framework.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 Equality Impact Assessments will be completed where necessary as part of the recovery planning process.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

- 7.1 The Well-being and Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, requires an assessment and a summary of the implications relating to the five ways of working set out in the Act. In this case the intention of the report is to set out the Council's overall planning framework and approach to recovery with separate detailed recovery plans to be produced by individual service areas as necessary. An overall summary of our approach, that is consistent with the requirements of the Act, is set out below:

- 7.2 **Long Term** - The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs. The proposed approach of 'restart, recover and renew', has been identified taking account of the need to both seek to implement immediate measures to restart some elements of the Council's business, but also to plan for a long term sustainable future, recognising the potential long term challenges and impacts that Covid-19 will continue to have on all aspects of the Council's business.

- 7.3 **Prevention** - How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives. A great deal of work has already been undertaken by the Council and its partners in relation to the impacts of the coronavirus outbreak. Preventative action will be taken where the need arises to ensure readiness for any future local spike or second peak of the virus.

- 7.4 **Integration** - Considering how the public body's well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies. The proposed framework and broad recovery planning approach will ensure an integrated approach to all matters directed at supporting the County Borough through the current situation and into the future. This will include reviewing the existing objectives in the Corporate Plan and reviewing and potentially re-purposing the approved medium term financial strategy for this year based on revised priorities to aid recovery.

- 7.5 **Collaboration** - Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives. The Council's approach to recovery planning will take place in a co-ordinated and coherent way, involving all Directorates and in partnership with key stakeholders, including the Public Services Board who intend carrying out a community impact assessment to inform our plans.

- 7.6 **Involvement** - The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves. The detailed recovery plans that will be developed for some service

areas as part of the recovery planning process, in order to be successful will require the involvement of key stakeholders. For example as necessary, elected members from across the political spectrum, staff, business representatives, school and governing body representatives, trade unions, health representatives, and third sector representatives. A programme of engagement, and where appropriate co-production, specific to each area of recovery will need to be formulated, including appropriate and proportionate engagement with the public, but also recognising the pace with which responses are having to be made as 'lockdown' is eased further and a 'new normal' begins to emerge.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report, however the Council faces substantial financial challenges due to the impact of Covid-19. These include significant additional costs and loss of income over the first and second quarters of the 2020/21 financial year, and likelihood of this continuing. It is also unclear at this stage the extent to which future funding and support from both the UK and Welsh Government will be available and what levels of our financial loss we will be able to claim.
- 8.2 A detailed report will be presented to Cabinet on 21st July 2020 providing an update on the Council's revenue financial position as at 30th June 2020 and the inevitable impact that the Covid-19 pandemic will have on the Council's financial position.

9. Recommendations

- 9.1 That Members note the presentation of the Chief Executive;
- 9.2 To note the approach approved by Cabinet to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and allow the Council to re-start, recover and renew its service provision;
- 9.3 To note the establishment of a Cross-Party Recovery Panel to help shape, inform, and advise Cabinet on the Council's recovery planning.

Mark Shephard
Chief Executive
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Contact Officer: Mark Shephard
Telephone: (01656) 643136

E-mail: mark.shephard@bridgend.gov.uk

Postal Address:
Bridgend County Borough Council
Civic Offices
Angel Street
Bridgend
CF31 4WP

Background Documents:

- Report to Cabinet dated 30th June 2020: Recovery Planning from the impact of Covid-19
- Report to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee dated 13th July 2020: Establishment of a Cross-Party Recovery Panel
- Report to Cabinet dated 21st July 2020: Budget Monitoring 2020-21 Quarter 1 Revenue Forecast.