

**BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
CROSS-PARTY RECOVERY PANEL – COVID-19 PANDEMIC
PHASE 1 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. A summary of the outcomes from the Cross-Party Recovery Panel meetings to date is set out below:
2. **Meeting 1 - 4 August 2020**
 - 2.1. The Panel appointed Cllr Stuart Baldwin as Chairperson and Councillor Tim Thomas as Vice-Chairperson and accepted the Terms of Reference agreed by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
 - 2.2. Officers from Audit Wales introduced themselves and explained that they were attending the meeting as part of a wider piece of work observing Local Authorities recovery planning for assurance. They had also agreed to use their 2019 Discussion Paper: Six themes to help make scrutiny 'Fit for the Future' as a platform to provide some guidance to the Panel on its next steps. They reminded the Panel of the themes within the paper, including: the rigour with which scrutiny is prioritised and planned; responding to current and future challenges may need different approaches to supporting committee members, and; evaluating the effectiveness of scrutiny.
 - 2.3. The Panel discussed the following:
 - The benefit of smaller group work such as task and finish groups having a key impact on scrutiny, but most scrutiny work being undertaken through Committees.
 - Lack of resources can make good scrutiny difficult, previous under resourcing potentially devalued scrutiny.
 - Panel being asked to look at community support and developing resources when the Economic task Force providing Training and Support.
 - Scrutiny outcomes and recommendations needing to be more specific and focussed.
 - 2.4. Selection of Key Issues to examine in Greater Depth
 - The Panel were reminded of the 10 key priorities identified in the list reported to Cabinet, the request to avoid duplication of work with the Economic Task Force, Budget Research and Evaluation Panel, the need to consider the essential criteria when identifying and selecting key areas of work to examine in greater depth and the challenging window of opportunity for key areas of focus to be examined and Recommendations fed back to Cabinet in September in order to feed into the realignment of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and Corporate Plan.

- The Panel were reminded that members of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee were keen for the Panel at one of its earliest meetings to meet with the Public Service Board (PSB) Team support officers to discuss the focus of the Community Impact Assessment and the expert witnesses it may wish to hear from. The findings of the assessment may indicate key areas that the Panel may wish to consider examining in greater depth beyond September (subject to the agreement of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee).
- The Panel discussed and explored a number of potential key areas including:
 - Key priorities 5, 6 and 7 identified in the list to Cabinet and listed below were considered to be important:
 - 5 - Homelessness: provision and services post lockdown;
 - 6 - Supporting the most vulnerable, and those who care for them, including nurturing the excellent relationship with the Third Sector and developing and enhancing community resilience;
 - 7 - Stopping the spread and return of the virus: Health and Safety; provision of a stockpile of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); ongoing Contact Tracing;

It was acknowledged that each of the above were wide areas of focus, and could not all be realistically examined in the time available for Recommendations to Cabinet in September.

- Reopening Schools in September – whilst there was some concern about the challenge of returning all pupils safely within 2 weeks of starting back, it was accepted that the Panel would not be able to make its recommendations to Cabinet until two weeks after the Schools had returned. The Panel acknowledged that plans were in place and Governing Bodies that Members sat on were already preparing for this work.
- Responding to the economic crisis – it was accepted that this would be within the remit of the Economic Task Force and duplication of work should be avoided.
- Future sustainability of culture, leisure and green spaces should be added to the list of key priorities identified in the Cabinet report. 586 people had responded to the Bridgend Open Spaces Survey and 93% felt that during lockdown green space helped their personal, family health and mental health. It was accepted that this was not an area of focus to be explored in greater depth at this time.
- People, Performance and Finance were proposed as key areas for examination in greater depth but again it was acknowledged that these were wide areas of focus and could not realistically be examined in the time available to report Recommendations to Cabinet in September. With Finance, there was a potential for duplication with work of the Budget Research and Evaluation Panel and Economic Task Force.

- The need to have a clear understanding of the remit of the Economic Task Force and BREP to help avoid duplication.
- It would be useful to invite PSB Officers to present to the panel as soon as possible regarding the Community Impact Assessment that is being undertaken.
- The opportunity to speak to Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations (BAVO) about the volunteers in the community and their capacity and resilience, as the Community Impact assessment may not get to those hard to reach people, and some people coming out of shielding had become more dependent and or vulnerable and volunteers were becoming unavailable as they returned to work.
- Services for the most vulnerable in communities / potential for care homes to close / the impact of a second phase upon capacity for vulnerable people.
- What had been done so far, what could be done better and what is needed if there is a second spike.
- The importance of childcare places and the impact on parents returning to work safely.

Recommendation 1

The Panel recommends that the future sustainability of culture, leisure and green spaces should be added to the list of key priorities that were identified in the recovery planning Cabinet report of 30 June 2020, in order to facilitate health, exercise and wellbeing.

Recommendation 2

The Panel recommends that the Economic Taskforce training that had already been offered to businesses should be offered to the Third Sector and Charities, to avoid duplication of effort.

Recommendation 3

The panel recommends that through the Welsh Government Procurement, all organisations providing care across the County Borough have access to suitable and appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) following Welsh Government and Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidelines, for the activity being undertaken.

3. Meeting 2 - 7 August 2020

- 3.1. Public Service Board (PSB) Team Officers were invited to the meeting to update the Panel on the PSB Community Impact Assessment (CIA), its scope and timetable and answer the Panel's questions.
- 3.2. The Panel discussed the following:
 - The draft CIA should be ready by 4 September, to be formally approved by the PSB on 21 September and ready for publication after that.
 - Clarification that there were two phases; Phase 1 was the work identified at the previous meeting and following lines of inquiry, before feeding back the Panel's Recommendations in the short term to the COSC and Cabinet in September. The PSB's Community Impact Assessment would be useful for the Panel to examine before refining the areas it wished to examine in greater depth beyond September (subject to the agreement of COSC).
 - It was requested that the Panel have sight of the draft CIA available in early September, to assist the Panel with refining the key area of focus post September.
 - Consideration that the R number was much higher outside Bridgend and the need to make sure that services were more localised and appropriate for the County Borough. Where possible data would be sought at a lower level, in order to understand the impact of different communities within local authorities, both geographically and in communities of interest.
 - Whether information requested by the third sector would be received by the necessary deadline. The PSB could talk to BAVO if there were any gaps in information.
 - Whether Town Centre Public Survey results could feed into the CIA. The PSB Support Officers confirmed that they would work with the Authority's Communications Team to get the survey quickly to feed in as many local views as possible.
 - Whether Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) would feed into the CIA. The request for Information had been sent to all the RSLs, so far there had been a good response and any gaps would be identified and they could go back out if need be, recognising the importance of getting as many people's views as possible.
 - Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) comprised a third of the population of Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board but had disproportionately less Covid-19 cases and whether good practice was being shared between the three local authority areas.

- Difficulties of getting in touch with the hard to reach to find out the real impact of the pandemic. The reliance on partners such as the Wallich, Pobl and others to get that information back and the Area Planning Board regarding how to engage with substance misuse service users.
- Whether paid or sponsored advertising across media platforms had been considered, but this did not reach the very hard to reach but could be discussed with the CIA task and finish group on 18 August.
- Covid-19 had resulted in loneliness, isolation and mental health concerns were rising, plus there was a cohort of young people leaving education without employment opportunities and fewer interactions socially, all of whom needed to be reached. The CIA should gain evidence upon these challenges to target the areas with joint interventions.
- Vulnerable Groups had been concerned about the lack of contact and support and how harder to reach people can be reached and asked that this be taken back to the PSB.
- Evergreen Hall had six months of funding to put together a monthly newsletter to keep membership connected which could be circulated to anyone who requested it include relevant information which could be taken back to the PSB Task and Finish Group.
- Engagement with blind and partially sighted relied upon partners including the Bridgend Community Cohesion and Equality Forum and the third Sector or Health Workers that engaged with people with a range of disabilities.
- Clarification that Care and Repair were part of the wider partnership of the Regional Partnership Board through Health and Social Care.
- Bridgend Care and Repair had a further 3 years funding from Welsh Government to support people aged 50 plus who may be living with sight loss, hearing loss, dementia or a stroke survivor which could be a key line of enquiry.

4. Meeting 3 – 12 August 2020

- 4.1. The Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations (BAVO) Chief Executive, Operational manager and a Community Navigator presented to the panel the background to the development by BAVO over the past few years, the response to the impact of Covid-19 across Communities and the third Sector and answered questions regarding the support provided to the most vulnerable / shielded people that BAVO had coordinated through volunteers for shopping / prescription collection, etc. including the challenges of:
 - The effect austerity had had on people, communities and organisations including local authorities and the third sector, with funding being

substantially reduced over the past decade and the move to a more competitive tendering process meaning that the local third sector struggled to get the investment they needed.

- A backdrop of more and more referrals going to the Third sector from: the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), GPs, Social Services, Mental Health teams and Employability Projects, providing an uncoordinated and pressured environment for the Third Sector with no investment to go with it.
- BAVO had some conversation with the Third sector organisations who were struggling, taking more and more people on with less funding available and a conversation took place about how BAVO could support change, to develop more coordination in communities and develop more resilience in people and organisations, by going through a change model to identify what key things were needed to develop resilience in communities.
- They used a two-pronged approach. Third sector organisations needed infrastructure support in terms of development, having up to date policies, safeguarding training, funding advice, to have volunteers matched to them with a particular level of skills so it did not impact on training costs. The other side was how to provide people in need with the best signposting support, try and maintain their wellbeing and maintain independence and a programme called Resilient Connected Communities was awarded Transformation Grant funding in June 2019.
- This started a recruitment process getting development support, volunteer support, an activator, who would help individuals in Communities who might want to set up something that's not a formal constituted group, but help that individual push some community activity forward. The other side was some integrated care funding to support a team of Navigators. They were the ones that provided the one to one 'What matters conversations' with individuals and signposted them into the relevant groups.
- Alongside all of this, there was also monies for grants so BAVO were not going empty handed to groups. They were able to invest in them through the transformation programme because there were grants available and they were constantly looking for funding to divert to the third sector, so it was not a burden on the local authority but was adding strength and adding value to the Third sector work.
- There were five community Navigators and a Broker, within the common access point and so there was a direct link there and the Navigators each took a different area of the county. During Covid-19, BAVO were able to redeploy the whole team to work around those Navigators and that included the volunteers recruited so that meant the Navigators were able to be very responsive in terms of diverting people into organisations for support, where they existed, during Covid-19. A lot of groups had gone to

ground and if they weren't able to be diverted to a group, we were able to get a volunteer deployed to help them.

4.2. The Panel discussed the following:

- Declining volunteer numbers as people return to work;
- Necessary signposting and /or referral of those supported to community resources and or services;
- Increased fragility / declining mobility of some vulnerable people during shielding / lockdown;
- Identifying and communicating with hard to reach vulnerable people regarding support;
- Shielding coming to an end on 16th August and the communication;
- Planning support for a potential second peak of the virus;
- How volunteers have been contacted to ask whether they wished to remain on the volunteer database for a potential future wave or crisis;
- Welsh Government (WG) Funding provided via the Transformation grant ending March 2021;
- Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) holding the Recovery budget rather than locally for local decisions.

Recommendation 4

The Panel recommended that Cabinet formally approach and enter into discussions with Welsh Government in respect of funding to be held locally as local volunteer organisations should have a say in how that money is spent in their Communities, rather than it being held by the WCVA.

Recommendation 5

The Panel recommends that no further cuts are placed on Third Sector funding and that a whole Council approach to funding the Third Sector be adopted. The Panel also recommends that the appropriate resources be put in place for BAVO to facilitate this.

Recommendation 6

The Panel recommends that Cabinet approach Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board to understand their Covid-19 plan in relation to both Primary and Secondary health care plans and obtains copies of these.

Recommendation 7

The Panel noted the Covid-19 impact on people with dementia in Wales and the massive deterioration seen in sufferers and noted that BAVO had worked with BCBC on developing Dementia friendly communities, but that funding was coming to an end soon, and would be reverting back to the Alzheimer's Society. The Panel therefore recommended that Cabinet write to Welsh Government to ensure that this is adequately funded.

Recommendation 8

The Panel recommended that Cabinet engage with Welsh Government on the continued financial support to eradicate homelessness and the use of more innovative approaches for organisations to do that.

5. Meeting 4 - 18 August 2020

5.1. The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing and the Head of Adult Services presented to the Panel and answered questions regarding the impact of Covid-19 upon vulnerable / shielded Adult Services service users, particularly in Residential Care homes in the county borough, PPE provision / planning ahead for a potential second wave of Covid-19, including the challenges of:

- Both in-house and independent residential care that had been at the forefront of caring for vulnerable people and those who contracted the virus.
- Domiciliary care that continued to provide personal care and support to people in their homes through the use of PPE and the continued use of PPE for the foreseeable future.
- The impact of Covid-19 upon Care homes.
- Supported Living Services (individuals with learning disabilities living in the community in a 24-hour domiciliary setting).
- Adult Services had very detailed business continuity plans in place across the whole of their services from the beginning of the pandemic meeting frequently to review plans for staffing levels, risks and some core businesses.
- Adult Safeguarding Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) had continued, with the majority of work undertaken remotely by core staff working from home and occasional visits to the office for discussions with the team.
- Mental Health Services continued to attend situations.

- Working together with the Health Board and Care Inspectorate Wales to achieve a common goal.
- 5.2. In the second part of the meeting, the Agency Director, Bridgend County Care and Repair was invited to the meeting and gave a brief summary of the work undertaken. This included providing a service to older people to repair, adapt and maintain their homes, providing a home visiting service, providing help to fund building works for adaptations, and advising and helping to apply for welfare benefits and answered questions upon the impact of Covid-19 upon services particularly in respect of adaptations and the impact upon delayed transfers of care.
- 5.3. The Panel discussed the following:
- Ensuring workers had the necessary support to stay home rather than feel obliged to go to work should they have Covid-19 symptoms during a second spike.
 - Regulations around statutory sick pay and lobbying private sector partners in the care sector to bolster sick pay.
 - Changes in practices due to Covid-19 e.g. telesupport, working with BAVO and links with Welsh Government regarding funding.
 - People in the community with dementia and Alzheimer's who required specialist support and whose health had been debilitated considerably by the Covid-19 situation.
 - Reducing the burden on the service using methods that would enable people to become more self-sufficient in the event of a second spike.
 - Testing regime of staff who were working directly with the public.
 - Disposal of PPE and the wearing of gloves.
 - Third sector and community groups support in the event of a second spike.
 - Those who had accessed Mental Health Services in Bridgend during Covid-19.
 - The process of procurement in the discharge of patients from hospital and alleviating the so-called 'bed blocking'.
 - Partnerships between Care & Repair and the local authority.
 - Relationship with registered social landlords and private landlords.
 - Turnover of adaptations made to properties

Recommendation 9

The Panel recommends to Cabinet that a holistic Service Level Agreement is set-up between the Authority and BAVO.

Recommendation 10

The Panel recommend that Cabinet investigate the establishment of an adapted housing register that works with all partners and covers the whole County Borough area.

6. Meeting 5 - 20 August 2020

6.1. The Head of Partnerships and Performance and Group Manager – Housing, were invited to attend the meeting to update the Panel and answer questions regarding the impact of Covid-19 upon Homelessness in the county borough, the current position and future plans including WG potential funding bids and the challenges of:

- The expectation of the WG on all local authorities to ensure that no individual was street homeless and provided with suitable temporary accommodation with en-suite facilities and where possible access to their own kitchen.
- Housing team had been under pressure to respond to WG directives quickly.
- WG Directives on reduced units within current provision where there were shared facilities.
- Excellent examples of collaboration and partnership working with the Wallich and Pobl.
- Predominant need was for 1 bed accommodation.
- Areas with the highest need were Bridgend town Centre, followed by Porthcawl, Kenfig Hill and Cornelly.
- WG under pressure to revise its homeless approach.
- Capital and revenue bids had been put forward to the WG.
- Not about a roof, but to have a holistic approach supporting individuals.

6.2. The Panel discussed the following:

- Homelessness is one of the outcomes of the pandemic and there is a need to have wraparound services in place to support people.
- Increase of homelessness was also as a result of the impact of welfare benefit changes and the impact of the spare room subsidy.

Appendix A

- That as a result of the collaboration with the Council's partners, this had resulted in street homeless people being looked after during the pandemic and that it had also kick started schemes.
- It was not a one size which fits all as there are concerns that services need to be put in place to support people with substance and alcohol misuse.
- Concerns of the impact on the Bridgend town centre of people not having anywhere to go during the day.
- Difficulties as the Council does not have its own housing stock and had to rely on hotels for homeless people.
- Concerns at the cost of putting people up in hotels.
- More people would present as homeless during a second wave of the pandemic.
- A more formal arrangement was needed with V2C to access Social Housing Grant.
- The potential conversion of 3 bed houses which were voids into one bed flats.
- Whether surplus Council land could be provided to RSLs to develop appropriate housing.
- Proposals for the use of surplus land for modular bids and the infrastructure needed to support people. The development of a rapid rehousing protocol with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in order to move people out of hotels and into different accommodation, but that RSLs look at former tenant arrears and may refuse accommodation.
- The Panel considered that the Memorandum of Understanding the Council has with RSLs needs to be reviewed.
- Concern at the lack of suitable accommodation being made available by RSLs during the pandemic in which homeless people could have been housed.
- Disappointment that some of the RSLs had furloughed staff when customers still needed their support which there was a social responsibility to fulfil. This reduced the capacity to deal with repairs and be able to repair significant numbers of void properties and make them available.
- The need for greater co-operation with and for more support from RSLs, particularly the need for a closer and more effective working relationship with V2C.

- Questioned the Corporate Contingency Strategic Plan for a potential second wave of Covid-19 for example what had been learned from the first phase, what was done well, what wasn't done well, what opportunities exist with CSP's with Health, Local Authority and Police partners and what can they do to improve and support this contingency plan. How will the plan be funded, what Capital funding is available for set up costs e.g. to support BAVO to fill a void and what revenue do we require to deliver this plan and ultimately who will be responsible for delivering this plan. If WG announced next week there is total lockdown, all contingencies are in place and ready for delivery. The plan should be communicated across the county borough.

Recommendation 11

The Panel recommend that Cabinet write to Valleys to Coast expressing its disappointment of their level of cooperation during Covid-19.

Recommendation 12

The Panel recommend that Cabinet write to Welsh Government regarding the decision of Registered Social Landlords to furlough their staff at a time of need, which has impacted on other public services.

Recommendation 13

The Panel recommend to Cabinet that the targeting of Social Housing Grant should be considered to develop housing options for the homelessness and people with support, to enable them to access suitable accommodation.

Recommendation 14

That BCBC prepares a corporate contingency strategic Covid-19 plan that will involve all statutory partners and Third Sector support networks in line with their individual responsibilities to the citizens of the County Borough of Bridgend.

Recommendation 15

The Panel recommend that Cabinet revisit the Authority's policy on the disposal of surplus land which could be made available for the development of affordable housing, in line with Welsh Government guidelines.

Recommendation 16

The Panel recommend that Cabinet consider exploring the potential of Bridgend County Borough Council becoming a Cooperative Council.