

**CABINET RESPONSE TO THE CROSS-PARTY RECOVERY PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE
CABINET ON 15TH SEPTEMBER 2020**

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 30th June 2020, in order to facilitate health, exercise and wellbeing.

CABINET RESPONSE:

Cabinet fully recognise and acknowledge the crucial role culture, leisure and green spaces play in ensuring opportunities for local people to participate in recreational activities, whether as a participant or as a spectator, and the impact that has on health, exercise and both physical and mental wellbeing. This has been demonstrated by the support that has already been given to our partners Halo Leisure and Awen Cultural Trust to ensure the long term sustainability of the services that they run on our behalf and promote a more rapid recovery from the impact of the Covid 19 lockdown. In addition Cabinet have, as part of our Covid response, introduced a range of measures to promote the continued use of green space both for formal and informal activity, including waiving playing fields charges and developing and publicising the use of rights of way across the County Borough. Cabinet are of the view therefore that these priorities are already implicit in the holistic 'public health' theme that has been identified and approved as one of the Council's four main recovery priorities moving forward. However, Cabinet are happy to make the link with culture, leisure and green spaces more explicit in line with the panel's recommendation.

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.

CABINET RESPONSE:

Cabinet understands that a significant amount of training has been provided to businesses and also extended to small numbers of third sector and charity organisations. This includes nearly 2,700 business with one of the funding streams made available as a result of the coronavirus pandemic BCBC undertook a series of specific measures to support businesses in different sectors to 'start-back' as restrictions were lifted.

In response to an identified need within the retail community, the Council's Enterprise and Employability section led on a 'Retail start-back pack' which included the distribution of 2,000 sneeze guards. These provided a barrier between businesses and their customers, which in addition to other measures put in place by businesses following their own risk assessment, aided measures to support consumer confidence. In addition, the team secured the delivery of COSHH accredited Covid training courses to 350 business employees across the County. This course supported awareness and understanding amongst the business community in relation to health and safety measures in their properties when re-opening to customers. Additionally, the team supported

efforts within the tourism and hospitality sectors with 260 guest registers delivered to local businesses to support Test, Track and Trace process as part of the tourism and hospitality start-back pack. All of these measures were specifically created in Bridgend County and directly in response to identified business needs following research with the business community.

Cabinet are advised that certain aspects of the above may be suitable for some of those in third sector and charities. If this was to be taken forward, a period of research with the third sector and charities would be needed to identify need and determine demand. Based on this options could be considered and resources secured prior to options being deployed.

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 PPE following Welsh Government and HSE guidelines, for the activity being undertaken.

CABINET RESPONSE:

Cabinet are of the view that the circumstances regarding PPE has improved changed significantly. At the start of Lockdown, PPE was in short supply which resulted in the "Push delivery" that all Local Authorities received from and provided by Welsh Government was totally inadequate to meet demand. For example the first delivery received from Welsh Government included only 1500 masks. Initially PPE was intended to be provided to Independent Providers under emergency circumstances which meant that such allocations were rationed to ensure that the meagre supplies could be stretched to meet wider demand, and in those early days, PPE received was inadequate to meet the requirements of national guidelines. However during week 3, the Push delivery increased to include in excess of 22000 masks, which allowed the Council to arrive at a formula that enabled all Independent Providers (and Council provided services) to be apportioned a share that has since resulted in a weekly delivery of PPE to all Registered (in the region of 60) providers of Residential and Nursing Care, Domiciliary Care and Supported Living Care. Gradually BCBC Push delivery increased to a maximum of 102,000 masks (in addition to 300,000 gloves, 10,000 visors and 102,000 aprons) per week of which in the region of 75% is delivered weekly to all providers. This regular weekly delivery has been a game changer for the PPE service which is very much appreciated by the Independent Providers. In addition due to the regular volumes of a weekly delivery a substantial PPE reserve has been developed within BCBC and provides assurance that should there be any drop of supply in future, the essential weekly delivery of PPE can be maintained for a number of weeks.

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.

CABINET RESPONSE:

Cabinet recognise that whilst local volunteer organisations would benefit from being more involved in the allocation of funding rather than it being held by WCVA, such a change would require a national approach. Welsh Government in their publication on the Third Sector Scheme in Wales

Report 18/19 (published July 2020) identifies how the WG invests in the Third Sector Support Wales approach (ie. WCVA and the 19 County Voluntary Councils across Wales). The scheme aims to deliver a partnership between Welsh Govt and the third sector to support the growth of a stronger and more resilient third sector, better policy and better public services. At the risk of generalisation, it is known that CVC's work with grassroots organisations (local and regional activity) many of whom have complex support needs, whereas large, national organisations tend to have staff capacity, higher skills sets and different support needs. The relationship between WG and CVC's is mainly channelled through WCVA.

Given the importance of the local and hyperlocal third sector response to Covid to our local authority, there may be value in WG reviewing the proportion of funding distributed between the national and local delivery agents within the Third sector infrastructure so that local and regional partnership working is the focus and third sector activity is strengthened and sustained.

Additionally, the proportionality and methods of distribution of investment into the community and third sector should be reviewed.

As an example, the small VSEF fund (£25000) distributed via the local CVC quickly injected cash into those organisations delivering crucial support on the ground in our communities, and it did so with good local intelligence and through simple processes. The fund that was centralised and distributed via WCVA directly was millions in comparison.

The next iteration of that funding (Voluntary Services Recovery fund) was wholly centralised with no local distribution made available to CVC's. The related processes of this centralised approach can create barriers and is proving complex for many small local groups, some of whom are not connected to WCVA or struggle with working online or utilising the MAP system.

There may be benefit in WG recognising the value of local CVC's distributing investment directly into the communities, adding value to other local investment (as was the case with VSEF and indeed, the old CFAP community grants). The CVC's are directly connected into the PSB and RPB and are fully aware of the local needs assessments and are therefore able to make informed decisions that tie into the overall ambitions for our County.

Recognising that there is some potential benefits in funding allocations being made direct to CVCs, Cabinet will consider how it can engage other local authorities to approach Welsh Government to gain a Wales wide approach.

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.

CABINET RESPONSE:

Cabinet are very much aware of the importance of the role provided by the Third Sector and have taken opportunities to protect and increase with other funding opportunities. Reduced funding has been considered each year as part of the MTFs proposals. Cuts to CAB and BAVO were part of the formal budget consultation last year and the proposals did not gain acceptance. The public and the

Cabinet were keen to continue support for the 3rd sector organisations and to maintain the successful partnership that has been built.

Consideration will be given to how we best work with our partners and ensure that resources are deployed in the most effective way.

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.

Cabinet recognises that there is close working between our services and Health Board during the delivery of integrated services and through the exceptional circumstances experienced during the pandemic. It is normal expectations that local authorities in the region will contribute to appropriate Health Board plans. The Health Board are currently in the process of developing Winter Quarter 3 and 4 plans for submission to the Health Board on the 29th October. These plans will be developed for the Region but further work will be undertaken to identify the specifics for the Primary care response within BCBC.

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.

CABINET RESPONSE:

Developing Dementia Supportive Communities is a strategic priority within the "Ageing Well Plan for Bridgend". The funding identified had been previously provided by Western Bay to BAVO as opposed to via Welsh Government and this funding stream has concluded. There are other sources of investment provided by the Integrated Care Fund that Bridgend is accessing and also some core funding relating to the Older Persons strategy that can support the ongoing development of work. This work can be progressed with BAVO and other local partners. BCBC currently commissions the Alzheimers society to support people living with dementia and carers on an annual basis beyond this funding which was not a large sum. There is the potential for cross sector working and partnership with BAVO to develop a strategic approach that meets the needs of Bridgend.

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.

CABINET RESPONSE:

Cabinet are fully engaged with the WG on this matter and share the ambition to tackle homelessness. Capital and revenue funding has been secured from WG to increase housing stock in Bridgend for this year through the WG Phase 2 Homelessness Scheme. This is for the financial year 20/21 only. This will only provide funding for a small number of premises. Cabinet will continue to request additional funding for on-going revenue and capital schemes that can target provision for homelessness cases. The cost of the increased guidelines for supporting homeless in accommodation is estimated at around £2m per year. This will increase further if our particular emergency provision such as Nightshelters and Floorspace provision is not supported by WG.

Recommendation 9

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

CABINET RESPONSE:

There is an annual SLA in place between BCBC and BAVO that provides financial support towards core resources and activity of the CVC. Additionally, from time to time opportunities may arise for project activities and funding will be put in place via an SLA or similar arrangement. Existing project funding to BAVO is currently linked primarily to joint work with the Wellbeing directorate. BAVO also act as a distributor for small amounts of funding to the sector on behalf of BCBC and other partners (such as Food poverty grant) for which an agreement is also in place. There is an opportunity as part of the "Building Resilient Communities" approach to explore how to make best use of overall resources and what this might mean in terms of further support of BAVO and the third sector

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.

CABINET RESPONSE:

BCBC has previously had an Adapted Housing Register which was removed as it was not seen to have real benefits. RSL's are key partners in the nomination and allocation process of all housing in Bridgend. In order to understand whether this is beneficial change to the new housing Jigsaw system that was established in January this year engagement will take place with RSL's to determine whether there is a need to introduce an adapted housing register and determine any operational changes, IT requirements and implementation timescale if required. Cabinet will be kept abreast of these developments and oversee appropriate service improvements.

Recommendation 11

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

CABINET RESPONSE:

There have been some previous difficulties with V2C, however the Council and V2C are now engaging more successfully. The Council's routes for re-housing and meeting WG expectations during the initial lockdown were hampered by a number of external factors such as limited private sector access to accommodation and Covid 19 impacted on all RSL's during this period. However all local RSL's have subsequently responded positively to the need to introduce a Rapid Rehousing Panel to help resolve and move people on from temporary accommodation. V2C and Linc have also been supportive in our bids to WG for capital funding to increase the housing stock. The co-operation and collaborative nature of this work is crucial in delivering housing and support schemes in Bridgend and Cabinet will reinforce with all RSL's the joint responsibilities and collaborative efforts required to meet homelessness challenges of the future.

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.

Cabinet Response

The co-operation and collaborative nature in delivering housing and support schemes in Bridgend is crucial and Cabinet will reinforce the joint responsibilities and collaborative efforts required to meet homelessness challenges of the future and seek reassurances from WG that support will be provided to RSL's to ensure that furloughing is not required in the future.

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.

Cabinet Response:

Cabinet already have oversight over the targeting and spend of Social Housing Grant (SHG) in the Borough Council area. SHG is a planned 3 year programme of development which is decided by Welsh Government. Discussions take place with WG regularly on new developments and projects with the aim of increasing stock. Discussions have been held with all RSL's to develop schemes as quickly as possible which will support homelessness – primarily one bed stock. It is also important that all areas and communities have a balanced and sustainable approach and development of all stock to meet rehousing needs.

Capital and revenue funding has been secured from WG to increase housing stock in Bridgend for this year through the WG Phase 2 Homelessness Scheme. Cabinet will continue to request additional funding for on-going revenue and capital schemes that can target provision for homelessness cases in particular emergency provision.

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.

CABINET RESPONSE:

During the initial Lockdown period, BCBC was part of a range of strategic arrangements that included statutory and non-statutory partners. These arrangements include ILF Regional arrangements and PSB and played critical roles in ensuring that Bridgend services are aligned to partner organisations to meet the challenges of COVID-19 in our communities. In addition to this we have developed a local Recovery Plan that has been approved and is based on Lessons Learnt provided by services. In addition a corporate contingency budget has been created that has been used to support necessary responses to COVID-19 and will continue to be used as required. Nevertheless we will continue to work with RPB and PSB to ensure that BCBC plays its part in such arrangements and deliver some of the expectations set out in the developing Community Impact Assessment being overseen by the PSB.

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.

CABINET RESPONSE:

Cabinet are overseeing the development of a new acquisitions and disposals strategy, which builds on current practice around achieving the best disposal outcome for BCBC - balancing the best price against the benefits being offered through alternative uses including partnership working/ community asset transfers, in line with BCBC policies. In essence the current practice works dynamically to support BCBC corporate plan and policies, including working with RSLs on a number of projects and disposing of land to them off market, where appropriate.

If there is a Council policy for planning to identify more land for affordable housing this will potentially negatively impact on capital receipts and hence delivery of other corporate programmes, unless there is a mechanism to fund the gap from WG.

However If WG was to make funding available to bring sites forward for affordable housing that otherwise are not viable, particularly North of the M4, this may also be considered as an opportunity.

Local authorities have a clear statutory obligation to achieve “best consideration” in terms of any sale receipt. So if it is to restrict the sale for affordable housing, it will need to consider the legal means (including state aid) for doing this; particularly where there is likely to be challenge from house builders on the more attractive sites.

Recommendation 16

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

CABINET RESPONSE:

In efforts to make Bridgend CBC a better place for residents to live and businesses to thrive, Cabinet acknowledges this recommendation and will explore in more detail how the Council can achieve the status of becoming a cooperative Council and to identify what the benefits and costs to such an approach would be.