



COVID-19: A PATH TO RECOVERY

June 2020

1. Introduction

- 1.1 'Recovery' is a workstream to drive the recovery phase of COVID-19, to support the borough's residents, the economy, businesses and our staff and members, in the delivery of public services and consider the financial resilience of the council and how it will need to operate in the new normal, learning the lessons from the pandemic.
- 1.2 This report provides an update on the new COVID-19 Recovery Coordination Group. This work recognises that there will be several distinct phases to activity, including work over the next few weeks as lockdown eases, the opening of the borough post lockdown and the medium- and longer-term recovery.
- 1.3 Reviewing the council's Corporate Business Plan will be a crucial part of the forward planning work. This document will play a key role in shaping the future of the borough over the coming years as we respond to the challenges of recovering from the impacts of the pandemic. Recovery will be an iterative process, highly dependent on how the virus is controlled over the coming months.
- 1.4 This work will be undertaken, which involves stakeholders including local businesses, members, the voluntary and community and social enterprise sector (VSCE), and the LEP along with the continued collaborative working with the Norfolk Resilience Forum, who are leading on outbreak control, as part of the ongoing emergency planning and business continuity response. It is likely that the council will remain in 'response' phase until the end of July 2020, overlapping the work on normalisation and recovery.

2. Background

- 2.1 This report outlines the planning work that is now underway to support the recovery from COVID-19 for the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk. This work is critical to support the borough's residents, the economy and businesses during this challenging time. It will also enable the council to make sustained changes to how it operates internally and politically. The recovery work will also include the financial recovery required for the council, given the very significant impacts that the pandemic has had on the financial position of the council, as with all other local authorities.
- 2.2 Nationally, the Government announcements at the March budget and subsequently have resulted in a total support package of around £50 billion, more than 2% of GDP. This is a larger package than the Government deployed in the 2008/09 financial crisis. Despite this level of support, the Office for Budget Responsibility predicts an unprecedented national economic contraction of up to 35% in the next quarter of the year, leaving an additional 2 million people unemployed. The National Institute of Economic and Social Research has estimated the total economic effects could be as high as £800 billion nationally over the next 10 years.
- 2.3 The economic effects of the health response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK are already dramatic – as they are in affected economies around the world. Early indicators suggest that the 'sudden stop' in general economic activity is more severe than during the depths of the 2008 financial crisis. Traditional measures of economic activity are not timely

enough to capture these effects. Data on Universal Credit take up, The Purchase Managers' Index (PMI) and national and local data of High Street footfall all point to the economy rapidly stalling.

- 2.4 The timing and phasing of the recovery will be influenced by national policy decisions made by the Government as the health crisis evolves over the coming weeks and months. It is critical that we start to plan forward for our recovery at this time of national uncertainty, as well as continuing to deliver the immediate response phase effectively.
- 2.5 This report sets out the key workstreams that need to be progressed for the council to prepare as effectively as possible for the recovery. These workstreams will link back to the priorities and objectives identified within our Corporate Business Plan. The workstreams will be co-ordinated through an officer group, in liaison with elected members and portfolio holders and will report to the Strategic Recovery Board, led by the Chief Executive, the Leader of the Council, alongside representation from the council's Emergency Planning team.
- 2.6 The success of recovery will be significantly influenced by the success of the national Test and Trace programme. Led by Norfolk County Council, the borough council will have a vital role to play in responding to any local lockdowns that arise through this testing programme.

3. Resetting the Corporate Business Plan

- 3.1 The forward planning work will start from our Corporate Business Plan which was developed through extensive consultation with members and Cabinet and was formally adopted by the council in January 2020. The plan set a vision for the borough, detailed below:

'West Norfolk is a place where businesses and people can flourish; where communities are active and healthy; where residents and visitors can access fulfilling cultural, leisure and sporting activities; and where a good quality of life and environment are available to all.

As part of our vision, the council is committed to ensure equality for all residents of and visitors to west Norfolk, and to its employees.

- 3.2 The Corporate Business Plan priorities and objectives were divided into six themes:
 - Focusing on delivery
 - Delivering growth in the economy and with local housing
 - Protecting and enhancing the environment including tackling climate change
 - Improving social mobility and inclusion
 - Creating and maintaining good quality places that make a positive difference to people's lives
 - Helping to improve the health and wellbeing of our communities
- 3.3 Although the Corporate Business Plan was produced prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the themes are still highly relevant and each of our recovery workstreams will link back to these themes. Alongside this, consideration will be given to how the communications strategy to underpin this work will be complemented by wider engagement with other stakeholders on planning for economic recovery. We should also ensure it coordinates with other parallel

strategies such as the King’s Lynn Transport Strategy, the Local Plan and the Climate Change Strategy, underpinned by the council’s capital programme and medium-term financial plan.

4. Structure of the Workstreams

- 4.1 A Recovery Impact Assessment (RIA) was been carried out by the Norfolk Recovery Delivery Group which highlighted a summary of issues and mitigations identified by Delivery Groups (DG’s) and NRF agencies in their responses to COVID-19. Our recovery workstreams will link to the appropriate sections highlighted in the RIA (some are focused on County Council functions, therefore not as relevant to us). These are People, Economy, Infrastructure, Environment, Health and Social Care and others. Again, these will dovetail into the 6 themes of the Corporate Business Plan, along with the financial impact on the council of the pandemic, which will require us to update the Financial Plan and the Capital Programme.
- 4.2 The structure of our COVID-19 Recovery Coordination Group will provide a focus on both internal facing issues and external issues. With oversight from the Chief Executive, the Leader of the Council and Emergency Planning, each of the strands will be led by an Executive Director, supported by Assistant Directors responsible for workstreams that fall within the remit of their directorates. Our response must be deliverable within the resource and financial constraints following COVID-19.
- 4.3 The table below demonstrates the sections highlighted in the RIA, the areas of recovery work that fall into these sections and how they link to the Corporate Business Plan.

Figure 1

Issues Highlighted by RIA	Recovery Priorities	Corporate Objective
		
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closely monitor and update budget impact analysis • Update the council’s budget to understand the short- and medium-term implications of the loss of income and increased expenditure during COVID-19 • Review the capital programme to ensure that the schemes still reflect the council’s current priorities and that these are affordable in the new financial landscape. 	Focus on Delivery (Internally Focused)
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home/office working • Work with staff and Unison to implement changes to the internal layout of the council’s buildings to support social distancing • Resource Management 	Focus on Delivery (Internally Focused)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff Welfare 	
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration with local businesses • Using Planning and Licensing powers to support businesses • Continue to deliver grants and support to businesses • Engage with businesses, representative groups and relevant public authorities, and monitor relevant data sources and emerging national and local analysis, to better understand the challenges facing business • Work in partnership to develop appropriate solutions to the challenges identified, including through our planning and licensing functions and by working with partners on issues such as improving attainment, skills and pathways to work • Work to deliver the Future High Streets and Town's Funds to invest in the future of the Town Centre to ensure its ongoing sustainability, re-assessing priorities following COVID-19 lockdown • Engage in wider recovery plans with partners including the LEP and the Norfolk Resilience Forum 	Delivering growth in the economy and with local housing (Externally Focused)
Health, Wellbeing and Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on the existing Lily service to continue with the Community Response Hub, securing funding and resource to continue this important work • Connect volunteering and mutual aid groups, supporting them to maintain momentum and take ownership of their neighbourhoods • Study emerging trends in equality impacts for minority and vulnerable groups and work with partners to minimise adverse impacts on those identified • Test and trace • A focus on the health and wellbeing of our communities, recognising the impact of underlying physical conditions with COVID-19 – building 	Helping to improve the health and wellbeing of our communities (Externally Focused)

	<p>on the good habits shown during lockdown</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To harness the benefits in our response to COVID-19 for support and wrap-around services for homelessness • Ability to stand up quickly to a potential second wave • Continue with our excellent collaborative relationship with the Queen Elizabeth Hospital • Harness social capital • Utilising our leisure offer to support healthy living 	
ICT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an ICT strategy which looks at how technology can enable organisational and service transformation – unlocking efficiency savings and providing a better experience for service users 	Focus on Delivery (Internally Focused)

5. Finance – Internal Focus

- 5.1 The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant effect on the financial position of all Local Authorities. Nationally, emergency fund of £3.2bn has been announced to support Council's through the immediate pressures. This has been made available through non-ringfenced grant funding of £1.6bn. the first funding announcement was 20 March and the council was allocated £96,000. The second was on 29 April and we were allocated an extra £1.5m.
- 5.2 The current estimate of the financial impact on the council as a loss of direct income will be presented to Cabinet in August 2020, although it is acknowledged that income has reduced significantly since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. We should also be mindful that the town centre, the evening economy and tourism being some of the last businesses to be allowed to re-open. It will also become clearer how local authorities will need to deliver further support requirements, particularly for our most vulnerable residents, whether in their home or in supported housing. We also need to promote other wrap-around services such as debt advice through our contracted services with the 3rd sector.
- 5.3 Income losses are expected to continue far beyond the initial crisis and may extend for a number of years before we see a return to previous levels. The income streams affected include business rates, council tax, sales fees and charges and income from Alive West Norfolk, which has received virtually no income since 14th March 2020.
- 5.4 As well as the in-year budget impact for 2020/2021 – due to a combination of increased costs (housing the homeless, investment in IT to enable staff to work from home, and lost income from car parks, commercial rents, planning fees, licensing event bookings and collection of council tax and business rates), over the medium term, the financial impact

could impede the council being able to deliver some services and some difficult decisions will have to be made in respect of ongoing service delivery. We may need to extend recovery of some debts over several years.

- 5.5 There will need to be a focus on our wholly owned council companies and how the pandemic has affected their cashflow and finances. For example, Alive West Norfolk has received no income since March and will require financial support. It is also highly likely that the fitness area of the economy will be one of the last to reopen and social distancing measures will significantly impact on their operations and ability to generate income for the foreseeable future.
- 5.6 The Spending Review planned for 2020 is now on hold. The Government has also confirmed that the Fair Funding Review which will determine the funding allocations to individual Local Authorities and 75% business rates retention will no longer be implemented in 2021/22.
- 5.7 The council needs to work with the wider local government sector to lobby central government for more funding to limit the impact on local services – and wider reform of council financing over the longer term. However, we need to take decisions now in order to provide a funded budget and a revised budget and capital programme will be presented to Cabinet in August to reflect this.

Key Recovery Plan Actions

- Update current year budget and present a revised revenue and capital budget for 2020/21
- Lobby government to ensure the council is compensated for the financial impacts of COVID-19, alongside beginning the budget setting process for 2021/2022
- Work with Alive West Norfolk on their reopening plan and focus on initiatives that generate income to ensure the ongoing viability of the sports and leisure facilities
- Review the capital programme to ensure the schemes still reflect the council's reviewed (post COVID-19) priorities and that these are affordable in the new financial landscape
- Future High Streets and Town's Fund realigned to the new challenges
- Recognise the importance of car parking income to the council's financial position
- Update the council's financial plan to understand the short and medium implications for savings requirements and use of reserves
- Focus on stimulation of the economy (new housing, business units)

6. People and Welfare (Internal Focus)

- 6.1 COVID-19 has forced the council to change its operations and how it delivers services to residents. These changes had to be made very quickly, displaying the council's ability to adapt rapidly when required. This has included new ways of working, with home and remote working for staff, who have quickly adapted to digital tools for running meetings. Council meetings have also moved entirely online via Zoom, enabling a live stream via YouTube for the public wishing to attend the meeting.
- 6.2 Since early March, staff who are able to work from home have been doing so or splitting their time between home and the office. Those unable to work from home remain office based or work predominantly outside. There have been changes to the internal layout of

King's Court and other council offices to support social distancing and this will continue to reflect the national guidance as social distancing measures change over the coming weeks. It should be noted that many council officers are designated as keyworkers due to the nature of their work in supporting service delivery during the pandemic.

- 6.3 A review of working practices will also be undertaken to support new ways of working post COVID-19.

Key Recovery Actions

- Operating in the 'new normal' – flexible working and supporting staff in the workplace
- Operate wider working hours/weekends to maintain social distancing in the office
- Flexibility within the workforce to work on priorities, including temporary or permanent redeployment
- Ensure staff are working effectively to avoid 'burn out' for those working on COVID-19 response
- Functions/services will be redesigned to enable effective delivery going forward – including recruitment and selection processes, delivery of training and welfare appointments
- More formalised approach and support for those predominantly working from home
- Continued support for shielding staff
- Build on the progress made with the shift away from face-to-face enquiries and focus more on online support, guarding against digital exclusion.

7. Economy (Business, Tourism, Retail)

- 7.1 **Delivering growth in the economy and with local housing** is a priority objective within the Corporate Business Plan. As such, the council will work closely with businesses across all sectors, the BID and Norfolk County Council to support them to open again, in a measured way, recognising that economic recovery will be private sector led. The council's role will be to guide, inform and assist.
- 7.2 The impact of lockdown on the three town centres has been significant. The council's objective is to support the local economy whilst implementing measures to protect residents and visitors from possible transmission of the virus to avoid a second peak.
- 7.3 The impact on the borough's jobs market could be significant. In April 2020, Universal Credit applications increased by 568% on the previous month and 343% on April 2019.
- 7.4 In the west Norfolk area, 15,700 people have been furloughed, equating to around 30% of the working population. When the furlough scheme ends, we could see a spike in redundancies which will greatly impact on the area's ability to 'bounce back' from the economic effects of the pandemic.
- 7.5 The economic recovery plan needs to be tailored to respond appropriately to our economic requirements as the national position on further exit from lockdown becomes evident and our understanding of the impacts on the borough are better understood. This will require good qualitative information to be gathered as well as devising a mix of traditional and new economic indicators.

7.6 Social Distancing

7.6.1 The council is working closely with the BID and Norfolk County Council to develop a range of measures to support social distancing in the towns as more shops and amenities begin to reopen.

7.6.2 It should be recognised that council enforcement powers to enforce against people not adhering to social distancing are limited. Therefore, there will be a strong emphasis on influencing behaviour, utilising social media and engagement with the local press to ensure the message is clear and consistent. Social distancing measures and guidance will change resulting in more complexity/ambiguity for regulatory functions going forward.

7.6.3 In each of our three town centres, there have been physical changes and barriers erected to promote social distancing and these have been widely welcomed across our social media platforms. Going forward, we will continue to monitor and review the measures and take further action if necessary.

7.7 Grant Funding

7.7.1 The council was given money by the government to support local businesses by way of grant payments. To date, we have processed 3,217 business grants totalling £37.33m, over 95% of our expected total. On 1st June, our discretionary grants went live and up to 19th June 2020, we had received 114 applications and had paid 71 grants, totalling £480,500. This funding has been essential to help tide businesses over during these difficult times whilst they have been unable to trade, together with the governments furlough scheme which has moved the burden of paying and retaining staff to central government. Presently, it is expected furlough will continue through to October 2020, so the full scale of job losses as a result of COVID-19 may not be known until then.

Key Recovery Actions

- Future High Street and Towns Fund and any additional grant funding – greater emphasis on recovery (stimulation)
- Creating opportunities for the hospitality sector operate under the new normal
- Harness the positives from lockdown, such as increased walking and cycling
- Sustain confidence in the residential and commercial development market by encouraging pre-planning discussions, progress planning applications to decision and drive our growth objectives
- Assess the impact on the visitor economy including culture, leisure, hospitality, events and the night-time economy. Consideration of interventions to support the resilience of these elements

8. Health, Wellbeing and Homelessness (External Focus)

8.1 At the start of the COVID-19 crisis, in his briefing to local authority leaders, the Prime Minister made it clear that Government saw local authorities as being responsible for the delivery of local services. In line with this, each council established a 'Community Resilience

- Hub' to support shielded and vulnerable residents, providing food, collection of medicines and other practical help e.g. befriending.
- 8.2 Our 'AskLily' service was well placed to lead on this work, with the required volunteers, networks and links to voluntary organisations. This was augmented by staff provided by the borough council and Alive West Norfolk to coordinate and deliver this response.
 - 8.3 Norfolk County Council set up a helpline for people to call with COVID-19 related problems and we created an additional CIC to manage the calls passed to us. These were triaged and directed to the hub to be actioned by hub staff.
 - 8.4 Over 7,000 outbound telephone calls were made by our staff to residents who had been deemed clinically vulnerable by Norfolk County Council, the CCG, GP's and from our own data e.g. assisted bin collection customers and those with a careline.
 - 8.5 This area of work will continue but will require funding and resources, although the level of support will, over time, be reduced as we move out of crisis response. However, there is a need to maintain holistic support of vulnerable people and this could be achieved utilising volunteers.
 - 8.6. There will be a need to continue to work collaboratively with statutory partners and the 3rd sector and this cannot just be based on grant funding or our contractual obligations.
 - 8.7 In respect of homelessness, the council provided accommodation for all known rough sleepers initially in the night shelter then at South Lynn Community Centre. These were then moved to the Travelodge. The government have been clear that councils must ensure that the homeless are given continued, wrap-around support and supported to maintain more independent or hostel living.
 - 8.8 As well as clinically vulnerable people, the Community Hub also received referrals from people who had been affected financially by COVID-19 and were struggling to afford food. If, as we expect, there is an increase in unemployment following the end of the governments furlough scheme, we may see more working age people seeking support. Recent data provided by Public Health has indicated that levels of social deprivation and poverty can be a contributory factor to the higher number of deaths in west Norfolk from COVID-19 in comparison to neighbouring authorities. If unemployment does rise, it will be vital that we advocate the benefits of healthy living and seek ways to support residents have more active and healthy lifestyles, if on low incomes.

Supporting the Vulnerable – key actions

- Participate in a county-wide review of the Community Hub offer
- Review resources and budget requirements for a new model of service delivery as the vulnerable/shielded will require ongoing support
- Working with the social housing sector in providing accommodation and wrap-around services for the homeless
- Review of measures to support those on low incomes to follow healthy and active lifestyles
- Actively encourage citizens to revert to more sustainable ways of obtaining food, prescriptions and support, guided by our Lily service
- Retain volunteers under the 'AskLily' framework

9. Monitoring – Key Data and Indicators

- 9.1 In order to measure successful recovery, it is critical to use appropriate and meaningful data across a range of indicators.
- 9.2 With the review of the corporate business plan, we need to review the performance indicators for 2020/21 and remove those no longer relevant, or switch them to ‘monitor only’ as it would not be appropriate to compare like for like on last year.
- 9.3 In line with this, we will develop a dashboard of measures to identify the impacts of COVID-19 on the economy, people, finance and communities.

10. Sources to Measure Impact

10.1 Impact of hardship on residents

- Local claimant count
- Levels of unemployment
- Universal credit applications,
- Levels of debt to the council (council tax, business rates)
- Food bank referrals
- Volume of requests to the community hub

10.2 Impact on businesses

- Business occupancy data
- Business closures
- BID footfall data
- Vacancies/arrears in our commercial premises
- Grant applications
- Business support requests to New Anglia Growth Hub

10.3 Revenue

- Car parking income
- Income from fees and charges
- Alive West Norfolk income
- Commercial rents
- Licensing and Planning applications

- 10.4 These are just a few examples of the data we will be collecting to monitor our income as we move through recovery.

11. Environment

- 11.1 The council’s Climate Change Policy will be presented to Cabinet in August 2020. This will also feature in the more detailed action plan for recovery to ensure that climate change and the green agenda are encapsulated within our recovery strategy.

12. ICT and Digital (Internal)

- 12.1 Another area which will be developed in the detailed action plan is an ICT Strategy to examine how technology can enable organisational and service transformation, unlocking efficiency savings and providing a better experience for service users. This is also required to enable staff to work flexibly to support social distancing in our buildings, whilst maintaining efficiency in service delivery.

13. Communications

- 13.1 The Recovery Strategy will be underpinned by a comprehensive communications plan, linking to the SCG in delivering consistent messages to the public, stakeholders and our partners. This will include actions to help encourage visits, shopping, events, confidence for residents, tourists, businesses, investors in addition to public information about social distancing guidance, good hygiene and local outbreak control.

14. Next Steps

- 14.1 Following on from the joint panel meeting and Cabinet on 30th June, a detailed action plan, with key indicators and measures will be presented to panels and Cabinet during July/August. By that time, the financial position will be clearer in respect of the government providing further financial support to council's dealing with COVID-19.