

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Executive Committee
Date of Meeting:	5 August 2020
Subject:	COVID-19 Corporate Recovery Plan
Report of:	Deputy Chief Executive
Corporate Lead;	Deputy Chief Executive
Lead Member:	Leader of the Council Lead Member for Economic Development/Promotion
Number of Appendices:	2

Executive Summary:

At its meeting in June, the Executive Committee agreed that the Council's COVID-19 Corporate Recovery Plan would follow the principles, framework and governance arrangements adopted in relation to the 2020 – 2024 Council Plan.

The principles and framework report dated 10 June 2020 set out the need to support local recovery, as well as wider partnership working where a collaborative approach would be in the interests of the Council, its communities, businesses and voluntary sectors.

This report presents to the Executive Committee the detailed Corporate Recovery Plan (Appendix 1) setting out the detail and actions that will be implemented as part of the Council's recovery process.

The more 'granular' detail of the actions that will be undertaken by each service area is provided in the supporting Service (Recovery) Plans (Appendix 2). Together, these documents provide Executive Committee with a comprehensive picture of how recovery will take place across the borough and within the organisation.

Having an agreed Recovery Plan will help inform future decision-making and ensures resources can be aligned to focus on areas that will make the biggest difference to residents, communities and businesses in light of COVID-19.

In order to ensure the views of staff and key Members were taken into account when compiling the Corporate Recovery Plan, a series of workshops were undertaken with each service area and with Executive Committee Members. In total, over 80 staff contributed to the workshops along with the Executive Committee Members. A summary of the key observations from the workshops is included within this report.

Recommendations:

1. To **ADOPT** the Corporate Recovery Plan, subject to any amendments from the Executive Committee.
2. To **NOTE** that the Corporate Recovery Plan is a dynamic document which may change.
3. To **AGREE** that authority be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to vary the plan as may be required in response to circumstances arising as a consequence of COVID-19.

Reasons for Recommendations:

The report updates Members on the need for a detailed COVID-19 Recovery Plan. Having a Recovery Plan will assist the organisation in terms of setting out the measures that will be required both internally, and in the support of businesses and communities, to adapt to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report emphasises that the Corporate Recovery Plan is a dynamic document and may be subject to change. For example, should the Council face a localised outbreak, or if there was a secondary national outbreak, there would be a need to quickly return to a more response-based approach and hence review or pause some of the actions set out within the Recovery Plan. It is for this reason that delegated authority to the Deputy Chief Executive, in conjunction with the Leader of the Council, is sought.

Resource Implications:

None directly associated with this report; however, there will be staff resource implications in relation to the implementation and delivery of the Corporate Recovery Plan. These resource requirements will be assessed on a service-specific basis following adoption of the plan and subject to Officer and Member decision making as appropriate in relation to agreeing the additional resources required.

Legal Implications:

None directly associated with this report.

Risk Management Implications:

The report presents a detailed Corporate Recovery Plan. Having such a plan will assist in risk identification and risk management in relation to COVID-19 and the Council's responsibilities in relation to recovery.

Performance Management Follow-up:

Further reports will be submitted as required. The creation of a recovery plan performance tracker, and scrutiny via the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, will be a key part of the recovery performance management and monitoring process.

Environmental Implications:

None directly associated with the report.

1.0 INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

- 1.1 COVID-19 continues to present local authorities, businesses and the community at large with significant challenges. Across Gloucestershire, there has been a collective move towards ensuring recovery plans are in place to provide the short, medium and longer term support needed for each of these groups as they seek to readjust and adapt to the consequences of COVID-19.
- 1.2 Council Officers have been directly involved in a number of countywide recovery initiatives at both operational and strategic levels. This collaborative approach has identified a number of opportunities to maximise effort and minimise duplication. Good examples include working with Housing Associations to address the homelessness issues arising from COVID-19 and GFirst Local Enterprise Partnership in relation to developing a countywide economic development recovery plan. These collaborative approaches and the role of partners has been reflected the Corporate Recovery Plan.
- 1.3 Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has created some unprecedented challenges, the Council has been well placed to respond. Strategic growth plans, particularly those associated with the Joint Core Strategy, were well developed before the pandemic and will provide a solid foundation to help kick start economic recovery across the borough.
- 1.4 Likewise, through the Growth Hub, the Council has over the last few years built up an excellent network of local business intelligence through the advice and support services provided. This has proved incredibly useful during the pandemic, allowing timely and effective engagement with businesses and an understanding as to how the Council can best support them.
- 1.5 The Housing, Community Services and Community Development teams have made a tremendous difference in terms of managing homelessness created as a result of the pandemic and supported thousands of callers through the countywide Help Hub Portal.
- 1.6 Sharing the Council offices with the Police, Department for Work and Pensions and Children's and Adult Services (Gloucestershire County Council) has enabled a multi-agency approach to address many of the complexities arising from the pandemic.
- 1.7 An excellent relationship with Places Leisure means the Council is well placed to support the recovery of the Leisure Centre, which is incredibly important for business and for community activity and health.
- 1.8 The Council's Corporate Recovery Plan (Appendix 1) reflects the national approach of setting out the short, medium and long term support needed to address the challenges associated with COVID-19. This has been done by considering what have been referred to as the 'three R's' the need to *refocus*, *recover* and *rebuild* communities, businesses and the voluntary sector:
 - **Refocus:** reflects the short-term analysis of the implications of COVID-19. Working closely with partners to understand how and what resources may need to be refocussed and where opportunities to collaborate on emerging recovery plans can help gain a better understanding of what recovery looks like.
 - **Recover:** reflects the medium term, primarily focussing on the creation of a Recovery Plan, that sets out the strategy and actions that will support businesses, communities and voluntary groups, allowing them to survive, stabilise and adapt to the challenges of COVID-19.
 - **Rebuild:** reflects the longer-term measures required to allow businesses, communities and voluntary groups to rebuild and develop resilience to a post COVID-19 environment.

2.0 GOVERNANCE AND STRUCTURE

- 2.1** The 2020-24 Council Plan sets out our priorities for the next four years. The Corporate Recovery Plan will be aligned with the Council Plan priorities and objectives.
- 2.2** Sitting below the Corporate Recovery Plan, will be a number of dedicated Service (Recovery) Plans (Appendix 2), setting out the specific detail of what each service area across the Council intends to do to support the short, medium and longer term recovery process. These plans - which tend to be operational - detail the actions, milestone dates and key officers responsible for leading and delivering each recovery objective. They are included here for completeness and to give Members further information on the type and range of measures service areas will be implementing.
- 2.3** To monitor recovery plan delivery and progress, a recovery plan performance tracker will be put in place. The tracker will detail each individual action, a feasible implementation date, accountable officer, a status column, plus a comments column to provide an overview on delivery. This is a proven monitoring tool as the same methodology is used to monitor delivery of the Council Plan actions. It will be a dynamic document which will allow new actions to be identified and implemented actions to be closed off.
- 2.4** Similar to the Council Plan performance tracker, the recovery tracker will be presented and scrutinised by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis. As there will be synergies between both tracker documents, these will be reported alongside each other. If a Council Plan action is not progressing, it is likely this is being impacted by recovery work and there should be cross-reference between the two documents. The findings from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are reported by the Chair of the Committee to the Council's Executive Committee and remedial action taken when appropriate.
- 2.5** By utilising the Council Plan priorities for the Recovery Plan framework, Executive Committee Members will have a lead role in the recovery process as it relates to their portfolios; however, all Members will play an important role as the recovery process develops, particularly in terms of community support and community contact. Members have been instrumental in terms of helping to develop strong links with many businesses and voluntary and community groups during the pandemic.
- 2.6** COVID-19 continues to present unprecedented challenges. Whilst it is hoped there will be not be any secondary local or national outbreaks, the Council must be prepared for this. The Council has been directly involved in the creation of a countywide Local Outbreak Management Plan (LOMP), overseen by the Director of Public Health at Gloucestershire County Council, that would be initiated should there be a need to do so.
- 2.7** The Corporate Recovery Plan therefore needs to be dynamic and flexible, and key milestones may need to change, should there be a need to return to 'response' mode at any point in the future.
- 2.8** Each service area has reviewed its pre COVID-19 workstreams and revised and reprioritised where necessary to facilitate the recovery process. This is reflected in the Service (Recovery) Plans. There will inevitably be resource implications as teams seek to deliver recovery work as well as business as usual. Consideration must be given as to how to resource and prioritise the backlog of service delivery once it is possible to do so. Resource implications will be managed in the normal way, in terms of a combination of Officer and Member decision-making as necessary/appropriate.

2.9 Together, the Corporate Recovery Plan and associated Service (Recovery) Plans provide Executive Committee with a comprehensive picture of how the Council intends to manage and deliver COVID-19 recovery across the borough and within the organisation.

3.0 PREPARING THE CORPORATE RECOVERY PLAN

3.1 The Council's Corporate Recovery Plan must be achievable, deliverable and sustainable over the short, medium and longer term. It must set out the actions required to 'add value' to businesses, communities and the organisation in the move to recovery and have the 'buy in' from all those it seeks to support and the staff delivering it.

3.2 A key part of delivering a successful recovery plan is proper preparation and using intelligence and knowledge gathered as part of the response phase to understand what support will add value as part of the recovery from COVID-19

3.3 Council staff and elected Members have been heavily engaged in the response work across the borough and a great deal of good intelligence and knowledge has been gained that has helped to inform the content of the Corporate Recovery Plan. Some of the preparatory actions undertaken to help inform the plan are detailed below:

3.3.1 Business engagement

- Business engagement and intelligence gathering (webinars, business surveys, telephone, email and face to face engagement) driven through the Tewkesbury Growth Hub, business cell and business grants distribution process.
- Implementation of a Safer High Streets Reopening Fund – grant allocation of £85,000 for the direct support of the immediate recovery of high streets within the borough, direct engagement with many town centre businesses.
- Direct participation in GFirst Local Enterprise Partnership business engagement surveys.

3.3.2 Community Engagement

- Ongoing intelligence and knowledge gathering as part of the delivery of the Community Help Hub across the borough (and via participation in the countywide community resilience cell) and through the Council's community grants programme.
- Communication with Ward Councillors, Town and Parish Councils and community groups such as the Tewkesbury Town Regeneration Partnership and Winchcombe Walkers via all Member briefings, social media updates, and via initiatives such as the successful social distancing measures implemented in town centres to support the safe reopening of retail businesses.
- Liaison with voluntary and community groups, via the work undertaken by Community Services, County Help Hub staff and Community development Officers.
- Engagement in Strategic Command Group (SGC), Tactical Command Group (TCG) Local resilience Forum (LRF) Recovery Cell.

3.3.3 Staff and Member engagement

- All staff survey focussing on gathering staff views relating to home working, organisational challenges and opportunities in relation to COVID1-19 and the recovery process. (134 responses, 71% response rate).
- Council-wide staff workshop programme led by the Deputy Chief Executive and externally facilitated by Lisa McCance (Shared Intelligence). The workshops focused on the lessons learnt from dealing with COVID-19 related issues and considered what should be central to the overall recovery plan while informing operational planning at a service level.
- The workshops included one to one telephone conversations with all Heads of Service and the majority of Operational Managers/Team Leaders, and bespoke workshop agendas tailored to each service area.
- A presentation and discussion with Management Team, facilitated by Lisa McCance and setting out the emerging themes from the workshops to inform on key messages and how senior managers could best lead the recovery process.
- Executive Committee Member workshop exploring what recovery means to Members and the businesses and communities they represent, what messaging they are receiving from their businesses and communities and how the Council can best respond as part of the recovery process.
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee COVID-19 response and recovery question and answer session.

4.0 FINDINGS FROM THE WORKSHOPS AND THOUGHTS ON THE RECOVERY PROCESS

4.1 The engagement process took place with Council Officers and Members of the Executive Committee, involving around 85 individuals. This was delivered through a series of one-to-one conversations and eight workshops or meetings.

4.2 Overall, there were several key messages from participants which have helped to shape the Corporate Recovery Plan, summarised below:

- Many Officers have managed increased workloads over the past four months whilst maintaining a high standard of care for residents, communities and businesses. Much of this work is ongoing and some services continue to focus on a high level of COVID-19 related matters. It is uncertain when this is going to change as, in many cases, decisions from central government impact Council services such as the ability to process payment arrears through the courts, timeframes for inspections of business premises or continuing to prioritise planning decisions. This may create a backlog of services and pent up demand so more aligned resourcing and clarity over priority activity will be required as part of the recovery process.
- New ways of working have broadly been embedded and staff are generally happy to, or are in favour of, continue to work from home with some limited office time. This will need to be a key consideration in how the Council operates in the future, ensuring it can still meet the needs of its constituents. This will extend to digital services, reviewing what can be provided online while continuing to address the digital divide faced across the borough.
- The future role of the Council will need to be considered as new partnerships have formed and new relationships have been developing. The Council has a role as an anchor institution, showing leadership and coordination to stakeholders. It also has a role as a capacity builder, allowing others to take the lead while acting as a facilitator.

- The increase in volunteering and community activity should be harnessed to ensure that communities can be supported going forward. There has been a strong contribution from residents in supporting their neighbours and ways to embed this further need to be considered, especially with the development of new housing and communities.
- A review of local assets will be key to setting the direction of the Recovery Plan. Repurposing existing Council buildings, enhancing online support or developing a plan for using facilities differently will ensure that residents are able to access services and support they need.

4.3 In taking these key messages forward, there are some considerations which relate to the core of the plan:

1. The Tewkesbury Borough Council Recovery Plan represents an opportunity to refresh and revise the Council's priorities for the future. This will be essential with the backdrop of budget challenges, high workload levels and a deepening community response.
2. Much progress has been made to deliver corporate programmes across the Council in a short period of time. Enabling Council Officers to work from home through the provision of IT, reducing unnecessary travel and developing online and digital solutions have been accelerated. Completing the roll out of these initiatives will set the future recovery.
3. Appreciating that the overall recovery will take place at different speeds, the Recovery Plan will need to be monitored and revised as priorities and resources shift. This will need to continue to monitor the safety of residents and future sustainability of businesses.

4.4 As previously mentioned, not all Council service areas will recover at an equal rate. The Revenues and Benefits team, for example, are still heavily involved in 'response,' specifically the processing of Council Tax Reduction applications which have increased exponentially following the COVID-19 pandemic. A number of teams were redeployed and have only recently returned to their 'day job' which in certain cases has been on hold since the start of the pandemic.

4.5 Conversely, the Council's Planning team has continued to process applications throughout the pandemic as this service area was identified nationally as an area where Councils should maintain a business as usual approach.

4.6 This unequal rate of response and recovery is likely to be reflected within the businesses and community sectors too. As such, the actions and timescales associated with delivery of those actions within the Corporate Recovery Plan will need to be viewed dynamically. Should a second national or localised peak in COVID-19 cases emerge for example, the Council will need to revert to a more 'responsive' focussed approach in order to manage the situation.

4.7 Additional resource or localised service reviews may be required in order to best deliver recovery (both within the organisation and to businesses and communities) The role of the Council as a facilitator, collaborator, and deliverer of services and its relationship with stakeholders is also important to consider in this context.

4.8 There will probably be a need for further reprioritisation of tasks too as the Recovery Plan is implemented.

4.9 Feedback from Workshop with Executive Committee Members

- 4.9.1**
- COVID-19 presented some significant challenges across the borough for residents, businesses and communities.
 - Council Officers worked in an agile manner while continuing to provide a professional service to all.
 - The Council is doing what it can to prevent a second outbreak, working closely with partners such as Public Health and the Police.
 - Residents and businesses are beginning to return to a semi-normal state and the visitor economy is beginning to pick up.
 - Consideration could be given to congratulating or celebrating businesses and individuals who rose to the challenges during the pandemic.
 - Residents need to know that they are supported and can come to the Council for help or be signposted to help.

4.9.2 Key considerations for the Corporate Recovery Plan:

- It needs to be customer-focused, considering the challenges faced by different members of the community.
- It must build on the community activity that has been taking place and ensure capacity is built.
- Relationships will be central to the recovery, working alongside schools, the Police and the Local Enterprise Partnership among others.
- Agile working has been successful for the most part, and consideration needs to be given as to how the Council operates in the future.
- The increased spending that took place during the pandemic has brought some financial concerns which must be managed carefully going forward.
- The digital divide that impacted residents during lockdown needs to be addressed.

4.10 Feedback from Officer and Member Workshop Sessions

The Officer and member workshop sessions have helped to shape the recovery plan objectives, a number of which are summarised below in relation to each of the Council's key priorities:

4.10.1 Finance and Resources

- A refocus of the Council's asset management plan to encourage better use of Council and community facilities.
- A continuation of the IT roll-out programme to enable new ways of working and delivering services to customers.
- Accelerating digital, online and paperless functionality while working to close the digital divide.

4.10.2 Economic Growth and Tourism

- To shift priorities towards working even more closely with businesses and the Local Enterprise Partnership to deliver sustainable tourism and businesses.
- Targeting provision towards residents in need of employment support or reskilling to meet the needs of the new economy.
- Refocusing efforts on the younger population to ensure they can become economically independent.

4.10.3 Housing and Communities

- Harnessing community spirit and capacity, building on existing and emerging community groups.
- Update demographic data to ensure support and services can be directed at parts of the borough in greatest need.
- Focus on premises which have become vacant due to the repercussions of COVID-19.

4.10.4 Customers First

- Review the delivery of services across Council and community facilities to ensure they meet evolving needs.
- Consider emerging requirements for internal and external communications, signposting and working with delivery partners.
- Refine methods of consultation and develop innovative processes with internal and external stakeholders.

4.10.5 Sustainable Environment

- Review net carbon zero plans to consider how COVID-19 could positively impact targets for 2030.
- Refocus attention on enviro-crimes and air quality monitoring to support priorities.
- Address recent increases in recycling waste contamination levels with residents to impress environmental concerns.

4.10.6 Garden Town

- Explore the role of digital as the “4th utility” within new garden communities to enable residents in the digital age.
- Consider evolving requirements for commercial (office and retail) space to address the needs of residents and businesses.
- Reflect on the need to promote “green and blue infrastructure” to promote positive mental health and the visitor economy.

5.0 PROMOTING THE CORPORATE RECOVERY PLAN

- 5.1** The prime audience for the Corporate Recovery Plan is the Council’s Members, staff and key partners (businesses, communities and voluntary sector partners). The plan will be available on the Council’s website, intranet and in hard copy format on request. Easy print and summary versions will also be available.

6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6.1 None.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 None.

8.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES / STRATEGIES

- 8.1
- Council Plan 2020 – 2024
 - Economic Development and Tourism Strategy
 - Housing and Homelessness Strategy

9.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

9.1 OUR PLAN TO REBUILD: The UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy.

10.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human / Property)

10.1 None directly associated with this report; however, there will be staff resource implications arising from the recovery as referenced in this report.

11.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

11.1 None directly arising from this report

12.0 IMPACT UPON (Value for Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health and Safety)

12.1 None directly arising from this report

13.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

13.1 None.

Background Papers:

Council Plan 2020 – 2024
Economic Development and Tourism Strategy
Housing and Homelessness Strategy

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Corporate Recovery Plan
Appendix 2 – Service (Recovery) Plans