

**South Lakeland District Council – Paper - shaping the COVID19 pandemic response****Purposes**

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has requested a report so that it may consider the main issues facing the Council in responding to the COVID19 pandemic.
- 1.2 This paper (produced in late June 2020) sets out a summary of the Council's actions, the main issues and how the Council may further develop its response to the impacts of the COVID19 pandemic in South Lakeland. This paper needs to be heavily caveated in that the impact of COVID19 pandemic is an ongoing situation which can change significantly and quickly (e.g. local lockdowns), the range and extent of impacts are far from known, much will depend on factors such as risk of second wave and when treatments and vaccines become available and the full scale and direction of the Government's response is still emerging.
- 1.3 Subject to these caveats, it provides opportunity for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to identify particular aspects of the Council's work in response to the pandemic which the Committee would wish to consider further in its work programme.
- 1.4 Responding to the COVID19 pandemic requires an agile and adaptive response as the impacts of the pandemic become better known, legislation and guidance is introduced and appropriate responses are developed in detail. This paper should not be interpreted as being the Council's confirmed response. It is a step towards the development and refinement of its response and the associated alignment of resources. Further reporting will be required to the Cabinet and Council to agree priorities and deployment of resources.
- 1.5 Importantly, this paper is not about providing a detailed review of actions taken to date or to provide the detail of impacts on the district or the Council. The Council provides regular updates to members on current issues, activities and Government announcements via the 'Coronavirus briefing updates' and the impacts to date on the Council's finances have been reported to Cabinet on the 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020. (See link from Background Papers). Further, the Agenda also has an item on the review of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

**Introduction**

- 2.1 The COVID 19 pandemic and its impacts are unprecedented. It raises health, demographic, social, economic, spatial and service delivery impacts. It has necessitated national action to control the spread of the disease so that the impact and demand on health services is managed. The resultant lockdown measures have impacted significantly on economic and social activity which in turn will result in further impacts to health, wellbeing and financial security for individuals, businesses and the organisations providing voluntary and public services.
- 2.2 Government introduced mitigating financial and support measures. The nature of how and when these measures are reduced and removed will have further bearing on the demand for local support mechanisms and services.
- 2.3 Risks remain for further spikes or resurgence of the disease. Response, recovery and 'business as usual' activities need to be designed so they operate in a COVID 19 world and that they need to address needs in the short, medium and long term.
- 2.4 For the Council, this will necessitate consideration of priority activities, how it continues to work in a multi-agency response and how it deploys its people and financial resources.

**Looking back - SLDC response**

- 3.1 The Council is a Category 1 responder in civil contingencies, fully engaged in the County wide response structures established through the Cumbria Resilience Forum. The Council attends Strategic and Tactical Coordination Groups and their specialist sub groups. Through these it has ensured its activities are coordinated with others, informed by national and local intelligence, and escalated issues which need strategic address. The focus of these groups has been crisis response.
- 3.2 In late June/July, the emphasis is moving from response to recovery and renewal. The Council is now engaged with the Strategic Recovery Coordination Group, the Health Protection Board (addressing the Public Health needs and local outbreak control) and specialist sub groups.
- 3.3 Through the Council's close association with the Local Government Association and the District Council's Network, the Leader and Chief Executive have been engaged in regular webinars with Government ministers.
- 3.4 As lockdown was introduced, the Council suspended its face to face contact with customers and moved to telephone, web, digital and social media interactions. Office based employees moved to home working. Compliance with social distancing requirements necessitated review of waste and recycling operations with Green Waste collections temporarily suspended. Lake Services (except emergency response) were suspended and Leisure Centres closed. Car parking charges were suspended.
- 3.5 Additional emergency response requirements were placed by Government on the Council, for example with regard to Business Rates Reliefs, grants to businesses, hardship funding. Council officers worked flexibly and adapted by shifting their resources to areas of need. There have been increased demand on Council services, for example housing options, bereavement services and council tax queries. The work force has demonstrated flexibility and resourcefulness in addressing service demands, rapidly implementing new procedures and service delivery. The adaptability, flexibility and digitally enabled workforce envisaged by the Customer Connect programme has proved dividends in responding to the crisis. The remote access, digital platform and the introduction of Microsoft Teams through the IT infrastructure has enabled the Council to continue to function throughout the crisis.
- 3.6 The Council has maintained strong focus on governance and decision making throughout. Emergency decision making procedures have been introduced and the introduction of virtual committee meetings now enable continuation of democratic decision making. The Council's strategic risk register was fully revised in light of the crisis and reported to Cabinet. Financial reporting to Government on the Council's increased costs and lost revenue has informed Government allocation of funding to the Council. The Council's 2020/21 budget has been amended with the situation to date, and the 2019/20 annual accounts submitted to the external auditor.
- 3.7 The Cabinet has regularly briefed Councillors on the situation and work of the Council.

**Organisational challenges summary**

- 4.1 From our experience of the crisis to date and in the context of the Council's pre crisis position in transforming its operating model and Medium Term Financial Plan there is need to address the following.

The full reinstatement of disrupted services.	Continued work to reinstate full operations in a COVID19 secure way. In addition to services delivered directly by the Council, this will include the amendments required to the Leisure Partnership Agreement. A review of other supplier contracts will be required to ensure COVID19 secure operations.
Assessing and accommodating new demands on the Council's operations.	<p>Some new demands will be short term, for example the distribution of grants to businesses, whereas other demands will have medium term implications, for example an increase in demand on housing options services.</p> <p>The Council will need to maintain flexibility to address emergent demands and changes in legislation. A current example is the Business and Planning Bill which will introduce a requirement for the Council to issue pavement licenses and amongst other matters, introduce some change to existing premises licenses and existing planning permissions.</p> <p>Additional demand may also arise from implementation of the Local Outbreak Control Plan.</p> <p>Recovery and renewal planning will also identify needs for specific initiatives. Please see section below.</p>
Loss of revenue Increased service costs	<p>Activity will be required to restore revenue streams, address impact of lost income and mitigate impact in future years of reduced Council Tax and NNDR collection rates.</p> <p>The Council will likely see increase in debts owed to the Council and will need to be clear in its approach to debt recovery.</p> <p>The increase in cost of services due to increased demand will need to be accommodated in the Council's budget.</p> <p>Increased costs and loss of revenue will be addressed as far as possible by reimbursement from Government.</p> <p>Continued work to address future years deficits projected by the MTFP, including the replenishment of Reserves.</p>
Strategic Risks	Implementing the mitigations identified in the Strategic Risk Register. (NB the Strategic Risks are reported in the quarter 1 Performance report on this agenda).
Decision making – virtual meetings	<p>The Council has successfully implemented virtual meetings. These will continue for the municipal year 2020/21.</p> <p>At present, Virtual meetings need significant levels of support to produce, broadcast and trouble shoot IT issues. The number of meetings needs careful consideration so as to manage within resources.</p>
Organisational transition	<p>Continued work is required to finalise transition to the new operating model and to promote continued development of digitally enabled services.</p> <p>Transition and change work has been disrupted by the start of the crisis and needs to be re-joined. This includes continued investment in</p>

developing the knowledge, skills and capabilities of workforce and members.

### **Moving forward - Future path**

- 5.1 Leadership Team, supported by officers, are active in drawing together available intelligence to model future demands on services, initiatives and the application of new burdens. They are assessing the levels of resources which are required to meet demand in the context of the new operating model. (For example, enabling customer self-help, further introduction of digitally enabled processes). They will consider the need for revisions to existing strategies and policies. Resultant efficiencies, proposals for reallocation of resources and securing of new funding will feed into future budget and performance monitoring reports, inform the MTFP and annual review of the Council Plan.
- 5.2 The range, depth and quality of intelligence on the impact of the crisis will improve with time and as impacts become apparent. For example accurate data is now emerging regarding the increase in JSA claimant counts and the numbers of residents on furlough. The Council will apply service demand and enquiry data to its resource planning. It will continue with strong networking, particularly through the South Lakeland Resilience forum, to share intelligence from voluntary, public and private sector sources, building a picture of issues and demand in the district.
- 5.3 In progressing recovery, continued collaborative working with the voluntary, public and private sectors is essential. It is critical that the Council plays its part, reflecting its roles, responsibilities and resource availability. The Council will need to best ensure others share local priorities and not risk the Council taking on activities which are best addressed by others. This will bring the strongest outcomes for the communities of the district.
- 5.4 At this point we envisage the continued management of the crisis and recovery will place additional demand on the following capabilities:
- Housing options advice, homelessness and private sector housing
  - Housing benefits
  - Local taxation, Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Hardship Scheme, NNDR reliefs
  - Premises licensing
  - Public protection – involvement in track and trace, inspection of premises, adherence to COVID19 secure operations
  - Management of playgrounds
  - Clean neighbourhoods – local neighbourhood enforcement roles
  - Support services activities – Finance, Legal, Democracy, Human Resources, Information Technology
- 5.5 The crisis has seen temporary reduction in demand for some areas of service, for example development management, local land charges, Disabled Facilities Grants. As recovery progresses, demand will return for these services. Resource planning will need to take account of the return of business as usual and the increased levels of service demand. This will require prioritisation of activity, effective commissioning activity and management of expectation.
- 5.6 Recovery priorities can be better addressed by adopting an initiative approach, which enables strategic and longer term intervention and corrals co production and resources from other organisations, including local community resources. Initiatives seek to address the underlying causes of issues, challenge the ‘new normal’, ensure other strategy goals are

addressed (for example Climate Emergency, Cumbria Public Health Strategy, Social Value and Social Inclusion), resulting in stronger social, environment and economic resilience.

5.7 At this stage, ‘candidate’ recovery initiatives could include:

Addressing housing needs	Ensuring increased demand for housing related services are addressed Addressing continued delivery of new affordable housing Additional utilisation of the existing housing stock to meet need
Building financial resilience	Reinvigoration of partnership working to address rising levels of personal debt and increased financial and employment insecurity brought about by the crisis. Assisting individuals avoid / recovery from debts owed to the Council Integrating activity with housing needs and improving access to labour markets.
Strengthening economic resilience	Strategy for economic recovery and renewal Collaboration with Barrow and Lancaster to promote and deliver sustainable and resilient growth in the Lancaster and South Cumbria Functioning Economic Area. Co- production of solutions with the private sector Securing ‘Digital Dividend’ – investment in digital infrastructure
Revitalised town centres and public realm	Ensuring town centres and public realm play a central role in how residents and visitors value South Lakeland as a place to live and a place to explore. Addressing change in the high street accelerated by the crisis Creating new ambition for public realm
Resilient communities	Cementing the continued benefits and experience of collaborative working with local partners and organisations to deliver stronger outcomes with South Lakelands communities.
Leading change and recovery in a COVID19 world	Development of member and officer roles in promoting change and leading resilient communities Engagement in County and Nationwide recovery planning Promoting and lobbying South Lakeland’s cause

5.8 Activity to promote recovery and renewal can be themed with regard to health and wellbeing, resilience and economy.

### Summary

- 6.1 The Council has responded effectively to the COVID19 crisis and is now moving to a focus on recovery and renewal. Opportunities exist to promote greater community resilience and take forward renewal in tandem with achieving strategic goals in respect of carbon reduction and promotion of social inclusion and social value.
- 6.2 This will necessitate careful review of the Council’s resources, Government’s approach to recovery, devolution and provision of additional resources and a corresponding prioritisation of our activity. Options and their implications will come forward in future reports.

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