Public
Key Decision - No

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter:	COVID-19 Recovery Programme
Meeting/Date:	Special Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) 25th January 2021
Executive Portfolio:	Executive Leader – Councillor Ryan Fuller
Report by:	Interim Corporate Director (Delivery)
Wards affected:	All

RECOMMENDATION

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel is invited to comment on the emerging programme of recovery work in response to COVID-19. A presentation will be made to the Panel at the meeting and a report has also been produced with some further information.

## 1.	Introduction

1.1	The purpose of the COVID-19 recovery work in Huntingdonshire is to minimise the long term social and economic impacts of COVID-19 on our local community and businesses.

1.2	The response to the global pandemic has been managed through our emergency planning structures (Local Resilience Forum – LRF) across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, which has seen a combination of local agencies working together, including both upper and lower tier councils, health and the emergency services. The recovery activity for Huntingdonshire is being led by this Council, in collaboration with the Combined Authority who have a role in economic recovery across the county. Work would usually start during the emergency response stage and may well last several years.

1.3	The emerging Recovery Programme follows on from the Community Impact Assessment that Members considered at Overview and Scrutiny on 8 July 2020. At that stage there were several themes identified which have been highlighted below:-
- Community support in the response stage had been significant with communities helping people in their own area and this needed to be harnessed in the future.
- Footfall numbers were significantly down in the towns and high streets.
- The job retention scheme was in place (which was subsequently extended) which had saved jobs, even though the number of people on Universal Credit and Job Seekers Allowance had increased significantly.
- Businesses – particularly in the hospitality, retail and leisure sector and small businesses had been significantly affected, initial financial support had been through a £30M government grant scheme and further grants have followed.
- Public open spaces were seeing greater use.
- Travel and particularly travel on public transport had reduced significantly.
- More people were walking and cycling which helped with tackling obesity (a factor in people dying from COVID-19) and mental health as well as the improving the environment.
- Broadband, fibre and 4G/5G coverage had been identified as an area for improvement compared to the provision of some aspects in other authorities.
- The positive impact of the recognised organisations in supporting the community was recognised.
- More people had been displaced or needed to be looked after as a result of COVID-19 including housing the homeless.
- Food banks had also seen a considerable increase in use.
- Home schooling provision was for 13 hours of tuition a week, and as we have seen recently many young people have gone back to learning online.
- Young people were more likely to affected in terms of job losses.

- Leisure activity had been severely affected with many facilities having to close.

1.4 Many of these issues still exist, and indeed some of them have become more significant as the scale of the pandemic and its impact have expanded; the recovery programme of work has been built around the broad themes that emerged from the earlier research. This programme will change as the area comes out of the response stage, out of lockdown and the full implications of the past ten months are further understood.

1.5 In many recovery programmes following an emergency response the aim is to return to the state prior to the event. However, with COVID-19 still in the response stage and the significant impact on our community many aspects of our lives will not return to how they were in February 2020.

1.6 It is also likely that several of the projects that have been identified will be on hold for now as it is expected these will become issues and need to be recovery work, but the numbers are not significant at this stage.

1.7 It is very difficult to quantify what the impact will be of the following interventions. At a national level projections on when recovery from COVID-19 will be achieved have varied from 12 months through to 7-10 years. In addition for much of the data that is collected on the wider community impacts there is a lag in this information becoming available.

1.8 The national announcement of a move to a national lockdown from the 5 January 2021 will also push the recovery timescale back. The aim of the current recovery programme in Huntingdonshire is to try and identify where investment of time and resources will have the greatest impact and speed up the recovery process over the next 15 months.

1.9 The role of Huntingdonshire District Council in the recovery programme will also differ depending on the nature of the project – some work we will be directly leading on and delivering and in other cases our role will be for lead officers to ensure the investment is made by other agencies in the District.

1.10 Regional level recovery is being overseen by the Strategic Recovery Group (SRG) for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Our local programme will link into and draw from these overarching plans. In preparing this programme at this stage consideration has been given to prioritising schemes based on the information Council officers have provided, expected impacts, timescales, the availability of additional funding / resources and what needs a corporate response within the recovery programme as opposed to what will be incorporated into the "day job" for individuals.

1.11 The key themes highlighted within the programme are aligned with the Council's Annual Governance Statement (AGS) risks (housing, economy, partnership working, long term health, employability and skills and environment and sustainability) and reflect the grand challenges, identified at a wider area level across the county (good place, good start in life, good work and good health).

1.12   Aligning our recovery programme with outcomes already identified as priorities for us at a Council (AGS) and wider (grand challenges) level will help to ensure consistency and delivery against the longer-term objectives.

1.13   Establishing an overarching recovery programme will maximise the collaborative working and benefits for our communities and will support the management of capacity to ensure that those projects of highest importance are delivered.

1.14   Having a clear recovery programme will help to prioritise work within the Council and the allocation of the limited resources that are available.

2.   Our Approach

2.1   Recovery will take the form of short-, medium- and long-term measures, depending on the nature of the service, scope of existing provision and any funding opportunities available.

2.2   The recovery programme will be aligned where possible with the work of the Strategic Recovery Group (SRG) for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and LRF to ensure consistency in approach across the wider area.

2.3   The recovery programme will be centred on the following key themes:-
   - A networked community for both individuals and businesses
   - A skilled and engaged workforce
   - A healthy population
   - A greener future
   - A thriving town centre
   - A self-sufficient Council

2.4   There are also a range of other pieces of work what will not form part of this COVID-19 Recovery Programme, which nevertheless complement it, including:
   - Government financial support schemes for example the self-employed income support scheme, local restrictions support grant, job protection bonus
   - The Towns Programme including Master Planning, Future High Street funding,Town Centre Wi-Fi, Smart Towns
   - The Accelerated COVID-19 Towns Programme of capital funding from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.

2.5   This work will be delivered as part of other Council programmes and where appropriate brought forward for Member consideration.

3.   The Draft Programme of Work

3.1   The following numbered list of items are proposed for inclusion in the COVID-19 Recovery Programme at this stage. As highlighted previously there is other work that the Council is also undertaking that is important but to avoid

duplication and to manage the size of this programme some projects will be managed elsewhere.

3.2   To give Members assurance several of these 'linked' areas of work have also been noted in each themed section. These bulleted items will not form part of the Recovery Programme however, do provide a broader picture of the work that is underway or planned.

3.3   A range of agencies have also been contacted to provide feedback on the recovery work that they are planning in Huntingdonshire, some of the projects that have been identified already involve the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and County Council. Agencies have been contacted recently for each of the following thematic themes (which are those used by the Local Resilience Forum): -

1. Multi-Agency Information
2. Business and Economic Recovery
3. Criminal Justice
4. Vulnerable People
5. Environment
6. Community
7. Finance
8. Health
9. Public Health and Protection; and
10. Transport

3.4   A copy of the proposed programme has also been shared and their feedback and additions will be built in to provide a fuller picture of activity.

3.5   The remainder of the section looks at each of the themes, each heading includes a brief outline of why this is a priority and then a list of the proposed work along with some further context. It may well be that not all this work will progress, however, these are the projects that have been identified at this stage.

3.6   **A – A Networked Community for both Individuals and Businesses**

During the response to COVID-19 our neighbourhood and business communities have come together to support each other and demonstrate through working more collaboratively what can be achieved. This theme focuses on further interventions and support into those communities to harness this capacity.

1. **Food poverty project to manage demand and establish sustainable food provision and reduce food waste within the community**

The project will use DEFRA funding to meet Covid related food need and build longer term sustainability in local operations – the team are working with 16 recognised organisations, mapping food demand and will then

look at allocating funds to support specific projects to address local needs

2. **Expanding our core information on local businesses through the implementation of the Business CRM**

   The project will involve the roll out of the Business Customer Relationship Management system across the organisation – to include capture of interactions between local businesses and staff, monitoring of priority businesses, reporting on and targeting business engagement and supporting the delivery of the Economic Growth Strategy.

3. **Develop a programme for lead officer and member engagement with the larger employers and key sectors**

   The project will involve closer working with the largest employers in the area on the challenges that they face and steps that the Council can take to support them directly and indirectly

4. **MHCLG project to support early intervention and direct messaging to identified "at risk" residents**

   The project will use government funding to pilot early intervention (direct / targeted contact) for a sample of individuals who have been identified as at risk of crisis – overall aim is to roll out the approach to prevent crisis and future demand for services / support

5. **Provide support and advice to businesses on digitisation**

   The project will focus on supporting smaller businesses to get their online offer established, particularly high street businesses. In addition, wider support to specific sectors that have been adversely affected and support for accelerating productivity will involve liaison with the Combined Authority and other potential partners

Other related HDC work that will be ongoing but not part of the Recovery Programme

- Working with 16 Recognised Organisations (ROs) across the district to retain the momentum of volunteering and this community support structure
- Support for businesses impacted by the changes in our relationship with Europe – working with the Combined Authority
- Engagement with our core businesses (including allocation of discretionary business grants in areas that best support our economic growth)
- Delivery of the Economic Growth Strategy
- Signposting to guidance and toolkits for businesses
- Development of a 5 Year Community Strategy

3.7 **B – A SKILLED AND ENGAGED WORKFORCE**

Getting people back into work will speed up the recovery process, this includes identifying growth sectors, retraining and reskilling to meet the employment needs. Making it easier for people to access support and opportunities to grow the economy in the longer term.

6. Kickstart – operating as a Gateway and Employer for the District

The project will engage and work with local employers to consider job placement opportunities and HR development, and will support employment of 16-24 year olds in nationally funded 6 month placements to support skills development and work experience.

7. Local job clubs – operating at central locations across the district, upskilling volunteers to deliver services and support to the unemployed with EDGE/regional direction and support

The project will establish 5 community-based job clubs across the district (Yaxley, Brampton, St Ives, Ramsey and St Neots) – engagement with volunteers, identified through the recognised organisations within the district, will include training and support via EDGE to deliver the local job clubs. Local people will be helped by local volunteers to secure local employment

8. Improving digital infrastructure - working with Connecting Cambridgeshire and local communities to improve provision to support business and productivity

The project will involve liaison with Connecting Cambridgeshire to identify opportunities to improve broadband connectivity across the district, fibre provision and will support local interest in the rural gigabit voucher scheme to secure funding for eligible communities

9. Young entrepreneurial support – commissioning the Princes Trust to develop a programme of opportunities

The project would support young people to develop entrepreneurial, new, innovative and tech-based business in Huntingdonshire

Other related HDC work that will be ongoing but not part of the Recovery Programme

• Job matching, sector-based academies and age-based employment support through the Combined Authority

3.8 **C – A HEALTHY POPULATION**

Improving the health outcomes for residents will reduce the likelihood of getting COVID-19. This ranges from finding permanent solutions for homeless people that have been placed in temporary accommodation through to wider initiatives to reduce obesity (one of the contributory factors for COVID-19 cases and deaths)

10. **Health living - promotion of programmes in the district including Healthy You as part of encouraging more healthy living / reducing BMI etc.**

   The project will look to provide new activities (possibly linked to BMI Can Campaign) to stimulate activity for our residents and will also provide signposting to existing activities and organisations that can help increase physical activity. Liaison with local communities will help broaden our reach.

11. **Rough Sleepers – reviewing existing hotel placements and a proactive programme of rehousing where possible in advance of the temporary accommodation support ceasing. To ensure that rough sleepers are actively involved in the vaccination programme as this is rolled out as part of the recovery programme.**

   The project will operate in line with Government "Everyone In" campaign. The team are actively working, with those affected to secure long term housing placements / address housing needs

Other related HDC work that will be ongoing but not part of the Recovery Programme

- Development of a Leisure & Health Strategy
- Promotion of and investment in our green open spaces, for example St Ives Park, Riverside Huntingdon and Hinchingbrooke Country Park

3.9 **D – A GREENER FUTURE**

Our green spaces and environment are highlighted as key selling points for the district, however, sustainable connections from the towns to the countryside need to be improved especially as more people look to work from home. The government has also highlighted investment in green technology and jobs as part of growing local economies.

12. **Delivery of tranche 1 and 2 Active Travel schemes, formalising some temporary schemes for permanent rollout and building on town connectivity with walking / cycling routes**

   The project to be delivered by the County Council to identify and deliver temporary travel adaptations that will support walking and cycling in the district, including temporary cycle paths and secure cycle storage

13. **Green Recovery Challenge – In partnership with Groundwork – part of a national programme to protect landscapes, connect people with nature and help create and retain thousands of green jobs across England.**

   The project will deliver three environmental improvements in the district: The Thicket rejuvenation (St Ives), Hill Rise Park tree planting (St Ives), Huntingdon Riverside Park river frontage and seating

14. **Improve the connections of our main towns and large employment areas by walking and cycling**

   This is a longer-term project to support connectivity between our main towns / settlements and large employment areas with the intention of encouraging alternative travel (walking and cycling) for short journeys. Developing a wider plan connecting the three main towns to Huntingdon and links off that network to larger employment sites.

Other related HDC work that will be ongoing but not part of the Recovery Programme

- Connection into the green growth opportunities in the Ox-Cam Arc

3.10 **E – A THRIVING TOWN CENTRE**

Huntingdonshire's market towns are central to our offer and the high street has been severely affected. Significant work has been undertaken to reopen and promote the towns with further work planned to help the high streets, particularly in a growing digital market.

15. **Town Centre re-opening campaign, Think Local**
   The project contains many elements and will support safe trading and the reopening of our high streets, will help support local retailers and encourage residents to support our market towns

Other related HDC work that will be ongoing but not part of the Recovery Programme

- Accelerated Towns Programme - CPCA awarded fund and reported separately as part of the Towns Programme work
- Build on town centre initiatives to increase footfall – looking at heritage / tourism offering
- Longer term CPCA funded Towns Programme (March 2022)

3.11 **F – A SELF-SUFFICIENT COUNCIL**

Council finances have been affected through a loss of income either through the direct impact of COVID-19 on the choices made by people and businesses

and services temporarily closing. In part this has been offset by some short-term revenue support from government. These services will need to be reopened and reviewed and new strategies considered in the light of COVID-19 and revenue streams re-established.

16. **Reopening of One Leisure Centres and building back our provision and membership**

    Project to include analysis of existing service provision, what future offer will be and a strategy for building up membership levels

17. **Promoting Council car parking sites**

    Project to ensure fit for purpose car parking provision and promotion of council car parks for those people making journeys by car.

18. **NNDR and Council Tax**

    The project to include reallocation of resource to assist with recovery process, taking part in county-wide initiative on council tax liabilities, maximising use of the hardship fund and working with Economic Development to understand the business community.

19. **Maximising rental income on estates portfolio - working with existing tenants, incentivising new tenants and reducing void times**

    Project to improve occupancy rates and alignment of commercial income with the medium-term financial strategy

Other related HDC work that will be ongoing but not part of the Recovery Programme

- Horizon scanning for opportunities to expand existing commercial investment portfolio (dependent upon sources of funding)

4. **Resources and Timetable**

4.1   The draft programme as set out is based largely on use of existing Council staff resource and the phasing of any work will be dependent to a large degree on when the lockdown restrictions are lifted. Where budget bids are needed they will be made through the normal processes.

4.2   Some of the projects have started as funding has already been secured and action can be taken now with the aim of speeding up recovery and shortening timescales which will be covered in the presentation.