Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

14 July 2020

Question from Chris Caswill

Agenda Item 6 – COVID-19 Update and Steps to Recovery

**To Cllr Philip Whitehead, Leader of the Council and Cabinet for Economic Development, MCI and Communications;
Cllr Pauline Church, Cabinet Member for Finance, Procurement and Commercial Investment: and
Cllr Simon Jacobs, Cabinet Member for Adult Social care, Public Health abd Public Protection**

Statement

At the last Cabinet meeting several questions were asked about the need to prioritise the climate emergency, and the environment, in Wiltshire's recovery plans. Now that they are published, we can see that there is only token mentions of carbon reduction In paragraphs 15 and 17 of the covering COVID Recovery paper. In the plan itself there is a brief mention of ' the new normal' but no consideration of what that will be. In the frankly bewildering set of groups, themes and partners and their responsibilities, climate and the environment are barely mentioned - for example there is no mention at all In the twenty or so bullet points of Principles of the need for a fundamental rethink of work, travel and environmental priorities. Climate and environment are missing from the key areas or themes under which the plan will operate. Another example is the complete absence of climate and environment from the responsibilities of the Chair of the Recovery Coordinating Group [RCG] and from the eight specific responsibilities of the Chair of the Economic Theme.

Question 1:

Will you now recognise that it Is not enough to say that climate and the environment are a 'golden thread' running through the Council's recovery plans? And that they need significant revision to address both the climate emergency, and a real Post - COVID new normal' of reduced travel, more working at home, less traffic and more attention to environmental goals?

Response:
Addressing the Climate Emergency continues to be a key priority for Wiltshire Council and that is why climate and the environment are a key thread that run through all the COVID19 emergency recovery themes. Recovery from COVID19 will be a complex and enduring process, which we are committed to achieve by working

closely with and continuously listening to our communities and partners. Environmental sustainability is a cross-cutting theme which will be taken forward as part of the council's place-shaping agenda. This will include integrating carbon reduction into health and wellbeing, economic sustainability and provision of strategic infrastructure. The Council's Economy Recovery group will be ensuring this work is progressed as part of the emerging recovery plan and I can assure you climate and the environment will be embedded as a priority and key objective. The council's capacity for tackling the climate emergency has recently been bolstered by the appointment of a new Head of Carbon Reduction who joined us on 1 June and will be leading the development of a carbon reduction strategy for Wiltshire.

Item 8 of the Cabinet Agenda outlines the actions the council is taking to meet its climate commitments. For example, in relation to reduced travel and less traffic, the council will be seeking feedback on its ambitious People Friendly Streets plan for Salisbury and has applied for funding for 4 key rail projects across the county.

Question 2:

The combination of the Recovery Plan and the Local Outbreak Management Plan establish at least nine new Boards and Groups, most of which have complicated links to outside individuals and groups. And most of which seem to require the participation - and sometimes leadership of the Director of Public Health. How is this extremely demanding system going to be managed, staffed and accountable? What additional resources are to be provide to those staff who are heavily involved, alongside their previous and continuing everyday duties?

Response:
The Director of Public Health (DPH) has responsibility for the delivery of the Local Outbreak Management Plan, however, it is a collaborative response requiring internal and external partner commitment. In Wiltshire we have established a delivery structure, where possible, built on existing meeting structures. The DPH is responsible for the health and wellbeing recovery cell which the sub groups feed into.

The DPH has identified deputies and leads to feed into each of the recovery cells to address cross cutting health and wellbeing themes.

Question 3:

How can the Council's much reduced Scrutiny resources possibly provide effective scrutiny of this complicated system? Isn't it time to revive the Health Scrutiny Committee and give it the resources it needs to carry out that function?

Response:

Overview and Scrutiny (OS) Management Committee leads the OS function and therefore the arrangements for delivering OS during covid-19. While normally OS operates a structure comprising four select committees, in May it was agreed that temporary, streamlined OS arrangements should be put in place to provide coordinated scrutiny input on the situation and the council's response. This was to provide non-executive councillor engagement on decisions, while ensuring that officers could remain focused on responding to the major incident and protecting the welfare of Wiltshire residents.

The streamlined arrangements comprised OS Management Committee, as the lead public OS committee, supported by a dedicated Wiltshire Covid-19 Response Task Group. Both bodies have been focused on matters relating to the pandemic, but are also able to consider decisions on other matters. The Wiltshire Covid-19 Response Task Group has met monthly to consider reports to Cabinet and its meetings are attended by Executive members plus senior officers, who answer Task Group members questions on the reports provided. The Task Group then brings reports of its discussions to OS Management Committee.

The Wiltshire Covid-19 Response Task Group's terms of reference allow it to consider any matter that would, in normal circumstances, fall within the Health Select Committee's remit (and those of the other select committees). Its membership also includes the Chairman of Health Select Committee (and the chairmen of the other select committees). To provide further OS engagement on Executive decisions, select committee chairmen have received pre-decision briefings on Cabinet reports that fall with their committee's remit.

On 8 July 2020, OS Management Committee reviewed the streamlined OS arrangements currently in place. Following discussion with the Executive and officers, and consideration of the ongoing response and recovery from covid-19, it resolved as follows:

1. The Wiltshire Covid-19 Response Task Group and OS Management Committee to continue to meet and consider reports to Cabinet, with the relevant Executive member and directors attending.
2. Members of Financial Planning Task Group to be invited to attend future meetings of the Covid-19 Response Task Group, and to hold additional, separate meetings as necessary.
3. To note the intention to recommence meetings of the Children's, Environment and Health Select Committees in **September**, notwithstanding developments in the covid-19 situation, with further discussion to take place between the select committee chairmen and the Executive.

The next arranged meeting of Health Select Committee is scheduled for 15 September 2020. Discussions will be held in the coming months regarding how OS can best structure its work programme and engage with the decision-making process to support Wiltshire's recovery from covid-19. It should be noted that the governance structure set out in the Wiltshire Council Recovery Plan is for the purpose of multi-agency coordination and the council's decision making procedures as set out in its Constitution have not changed.

Question 4:

Is it correct to say that you are now oversee and have responsibility for the Council's Local Outbreak Management Plan and the actions in that area that fall to the Council?

Response:
The Health Protection Assurance Group (HPAG) will report to Wiltshire's Health and Wellbeing Board (H&WBB) and LA Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) as well as wider reporting to the LRF.

A Wiltshire Outbreak Engagement Board, chaired by the Council Leader will play a critical role in ensuring that local residents and other stakeholders in the public, private and third sectors all understand and abide by the need to comply with rules and principles designed to prevent viral transmission. The main focus of this board will be outwards to the community.

Question 5:

In the complicated mix of plans to deal with the outbreak and the recovery, it may not be clear to the public who is actually providing services on the ground, and at this moment. Could you therefore take this opportunity to clarify:

- who is carrying out testing and tracing in Wiltshire's care homes, and what is the Council's involvement in ensuring this happens quickly and effectively?

  Response

  The Care homes initially will contact PHE who will carry out the first round of testing and contact tracing, as there are no visitors to homes at present this will be restricted to staff and other residents. The local authority is notified by PHE when such instances occur. If staff are tested due to being part of track and trace, then PHE will notify the LA and inform them of any actions already undertaken and any that are required.

The LA adult social care commissioning team have a very good relationship with the care homes in Wiltshire and carry out regular welfare calls, where any potential issues can also be picked up and acted upon

- are the Council's Environmental Health officers monitoring the arrangement ps being made by restaurants and pubs to keep their customers safe? And if so, how many establishments have so far been visited? If not, what plans are there to do so in the near future?

Response:
Officers from Public Protection's Food & Safety and Licensing teams have been proactively supporting the hospitality sector, including pubs and restaurants throughout lockdown and sharing guidance on the COVID-Secure measures issued by the Government. A checklist for the hospitality sector is available on the Council's webpages here.

Food and Safety officers are now engaging with businesses to resume our programmed inspection plan, although these visits will be reduced in complexity in accordance with direction from the Food Standards Agency to minimise interruption to the businesses.

Over the weekend of 4th and 5th July officers from the Public Protection Service took part in a joint operation with Wiltshire Police and Swindon Borough Council in relation to the reopening of pubs. In Wiltshire over 175 pubs were monitored for compliance for customers social distancing.

Future joint exercises are planned with the police.

Question 6:

How much of the additional funds provided by Government to Wiltshire Council has so far been allocated to Public Health? And what proportion of the additional funds now being requested will be allocated to Public Health?

Response:

The emergency COVID-19 grant funding received by Wiltshire Council amounts to £25.5m. We are expecting an allocation from the additional £500m of emergency funding announced on 2 July for Wiltshire Council any day.

These funds have so far only been allocated to off-set the additional costs and lost income that have been incurred in the 2019/20 financial year which amounted to £0.499m, as reported to Cabinet at its meeting in June; none of this funding was allocated to Public Health. However, the emergency funding will be used to address all areas of activity across the Council that have been impacted by the pandemic and further allocations from the emergency funding received will be made to Councils

services and reported later in the year. Currently Public Health are estimating no additional financial impact other than those costs incurred for test and trace, for which a specific allocation was announced amounting to £1.6m for Wiltshire.