

## Wiltshire Council

### Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

29 September 2020

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#### Task Group Update

##### Purpose

1. To provide an update on the meetings of the **Wiltshire COVID-19 Response Task Group** held on 1 September and 15 September 2020.

##### Recent activity

2. On 1 and 15 September 2020, the task group met to consider the following reports, which were considered by Cabinet on [8 September 2020](#).

##### **COVID-19 Update** (1 September 2020)

[COVID-19 Update September 2020](#) ,  
[Appendix 1 Recovery Theme Update September 2020](#) .

##### **Budget 2021/22 & Medium Term Financial Strategy** (15 September 2020)

[Budget Setting MTFS Sept Cabinet \(003\)](#) .

3. Members were joined by the following guests who provided updates and answered members' questions:

Cllr Philip Whitehead	Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Military Civilian Integration (MCI) and Communications
Cllr Pauline Church	Cabinet Member for Finance & Procurement Commercial investment
Cllr Richard Clewer	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Heritage, Arts & Tourism, Housing Communities
Terence Herbert	Chief Executive Officer
Kate Blackburn	Acting Director for Public Health
Andy Brown	Interim Corporate Director for Resources and Section 151 Officer

Maria Doherty	Interim Head of Democracy
Sam Fox	Director of Economic Development and Planning
Ian Gibbons	Director for Legal and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Jess Gibbons	Director for Communities and Neighbourhoods
Jo Pitt	Director for HR and Organisational Design
Ceri Tocock	Head of Communications, Marketing and Events
Lucy Townsend	Interim Corporate Director for People

#### **Budget 2021/22 & Medium-Term Financial Strategy** (discussed 1 September 2020)

4. The existing system of funding local government is predicated on the collection of business rates and council taxes, which have reduced markedly as a result of the pandemic. It will potentially take time to recover from that position, so action through the Comprehensive Spending Review may be needed.
5. As is always the case, a variety of factors are considered when making financial projections such as those set out in the report. This year those factors are less predictable than usual. While it would not be wise to *budget for* a worst-case position, it is always valuable to be *aware of* the worst-case position.
6. At an appropriate time, the council's financial resilience can be enhanced by developing a reserves strategy, based on Wiltshire's specific risk profile.
7. The Finance and the scrutiny teams will liaise regarding scrutiny engagement on the development of the 2021-22 budget and ongoing monitoring of the current year's budget. The Business Plan will be revised in light of the recovery outcomes and the financial plan will be crafted to support the Business Plan's delivery.
8. Conversations with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) indicate that the dates set out in the report are relatively reliable and an announcement regarding the settlement for local government is expected in early December. There is a degree of guesswork around the funding support that can be expected, but the indications are that support will continue in some form. The levels of support for business rates and the collection fund will be critical.

#### **COVID-19 Update** (discussed 15 September 2020)

9. The Recovery Coordinating Group (RCG) is providing strategic oversight of the recovery. Due to rising infection rates nationally, more frequent tactical meetings may be needed and appropriate response coordinating groups may be stood up when appropriate.

10. The issues being experienced with the national testing system do present some challenges in taking a public health approach to the crisis as the numbers of people in Wiltshire unable to access tests in a timely manner may affect our knowledge of viral transmission and outbreaks.
11. The council is using all its communication routes to encourage people to only apply for a COVID-19 test when they need one. Reports suggest that people are usually successful in getting a test with persistence, but frustrations with the current system are fully acknowledged. People showing symptoms are advised to self-isolate until they do receive a negative test result.
12. The council has been working with care homes to ensure that family visits, including for residents with dementia, are considered along with appropriate risk assessments being undertaken by individual care homes. During the initial lockdown, many care homes used virtual means to maintain contact between residents and their families, with Wiltshire Council providing additional funding to support the purchase of iPads and other technological aids. Government support through the Infection Prevention Control Fund has been provided. The council provides guidance on how the fund can be used in line with Government conditions. Only one Wiltshire care home has chosen not to take up this funding. Integrated Personal Commissioning (IPC) funding has also been made available for supported living and home care providers (25% of the grant) in line with Government guidelines. The first phase of this funding will complete on 23 September, but a further announcement has been made confirming that it will continue.
13. The report to Cabinet indicates that the Rates team have been notified of 361 business closures since 1 April 2020 and the task group requested updated figures once available. Some larger Wiltshire employers have proactively approached the council before making redundancies so that support can be provided to hopefully avert unnecessary job losses. A multi-agency Recovery task and finish group is focusing on this issue.
14. The council is working with our city, town and parish councils and business representation groups and are happy to listen to their ideas to improve income generation. The council is trying to be flexible in allowing businesses to take steps to maintain their income, e.g. cafes making greater use of outdoor space.
15. An officer review of the new cycle paths implemented under the Safe Space scheme has commenced and an update will be provided at Environment Select Committee. Evaluating these schemes is important to ensure that they are being used and have not caused unforeseen impacts.
16. Wiltshire residents appear to be managing their own social distancing very well. On some occasions the council has approached local businesses to suggest improvements to their arrangements, but in all cases these have been received positively.

17. Technology continues to allow safe, effective democratic meetings to take place virtually and it is important that people who are shielding can continue to engage in the decision-making process. Staff are in council buildings when it is essential for service delivery. Staff are also able to apply to return to the workplace where it is appropriate for their welfare needs.
18. The council's leisure operations continue to follow Sport England guidance. The council is taking a phased, localised approach to opening leisure centres and a briefing for all councillors on this will be circulated shortly.

### **Proposal**

19. To note the update on the meetings of the Wiltshire COVID-19 Response Task Group held on 1 and 15 September 2020.

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