

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

17 August 2020

Task Group Update

Purpose

1. To provide an update on the meeting of the **Wiltshire COVID-19 Response Task Group** held on 12 August 2020.

Recent activity

2. On 12 August 2020, the task group met to consider the following reports (links provided), which will be considered by [Cabinet on 18 August 2020](#):

Recovery Update

[Recovery Update](#)

[Appendix 1 for Recovery Update](#)

Financial Year 2020/2021 – Quarter One Budget Monitoring

[Financial Year 2020/2021 - Quarter One Budget Monitoring](#)

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

Cllr Richard Clewer	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Heritage, Arts & Tourism, Housing Communities
Terence Herbert	Chief Executive Officer
Andy Brown	Interim Corporate Director for Resources and Section 151 Officer
Ian Gibbons	Director for Legal and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Jo Pitt	Director for HR and Organisational Design
Rachel Kent	Public Health Consultant
Lucy Townsend	Interim Corporate Director for People
Ceri Tocock	Head of Communications, Marketing and Events

4. Cllr Gavin Grant of the Financial Planning Task Group also attended.

Key discussion points

5. The Recovery Coordinating Group (RCG) has now been formally stood-up. The Local Outbreak Management Plans (LOMP) were signed off by the Health and Wellbeing Board on 23 July 2020 and the council has been advised that the South West region's plans are amongst the most robust in the country.
6. Wiltshire is taking a systems approach to the recovery and the Chief Executive will be part of a Local Government Association (LGA) roundtable discussion with other local authorities taking this approach.
7. Cabinet and Full Council will continue to determine the council's policy objectives (now in terms of the recovery) and this will be a major piece of work in the months to come.
8. Work is being done to minimise duplication across the Wiltshire Recovery governance structure and to ensure that whenever appropriate decisions are considered by the RCG (even when the formal decision-maker is another body, which will often be the case).

Staffing

9. Council staff are not returning to the workplace from 1 August 2020 as the latest Government guidance would allow. Phase 1 of the council's Return to Work plan related to staff whose presence in the workplace was essential for delivering their role, with risk assessments undertaken. Phase 2 includes staff for whom working from home is not appropriate due to specific concerns regarding their welfare. Phase 3 relates to wider returns to the workplace, but these are not being considered this year. The organisation has retained its resilience and effectiveness working remotely and there has been little demand from services or individuals to return to the workplace.
10. Council staff are being asked to consider what has and hasn't worked for them when working from home, with the aim of the organisation becoming leaner but more effective. The weaknesses and strengths of working remotely both need to be considered and learned from.

Education

11. Central Government's expectation is for full-time educational provision for all school-aged children from September. Some children will find returning to school difficult, such as those who had attendance issues prior to the pandemic, and we may see increased absence levels following the summer holidays. The council's education and welfare service will support schools to address pupil attendance issues. The education outcomes theme will be monitoring attendance and providing appropriate support to ensure full attendance.

Safeguarding

12. Women's Aid were selected to deliver Domestic Abuse support with the relevant service already up-and-running. This service also provides support for men experiencing domestic abuse, but issues potentially presented by the name 'Women's Aid' were acknowledged and would be considered.
13. The expected increase to demand for child protection services will not affect thresholds for intervention, but the council may need to use its non-statutory child support staff differently. Statistical modelling approaches are being used to project demand as accurately as possible. Wiltshire is in a good position to meet the demand, though it remains a concern and the council is now matching its capacity to demand to see where the challenges lie.

Health

14. In Wiltshire 16 cases of covid-19 in the last 7 days have been recorded, which is 3.2 cases per 100,000 people. This is not considered high enough to be flagged with Public Health England.
15. 13 confirmed cases have been located at a bakery in Devizes. Environmental Health have inspected the business and were satisfied with the hygiene arrangements in place. We have seen good engagement with the business who have been positive in taking remedial steps.
16. Last month, around 600 appointments at Salisbury Hospital were not attended and a key communications message to the public will be encouraging them to continue to attend hospitals whenever appropriate.

Adult social care

17. The council is working closely with Wiltshire care homes. The care home market will inevitably be different to its pre-Covid-19 form and modelling is being done to project future demand.

Communities

18. The RCG is considering the impact of covid-19 on the financial resilience of local charities and further information on this would be provided to the task group in writing.

Finances

19. The Councils Quarter one position shows a significant improvement in the forecast overspend, which now stands at £5.9m, down from the period 2 (31 May 2020) forecast overspend of £36m which was reported to Cabinet in July.
20. This is mainly as a result of assumptions around two Government support schemes, reductions in forecast spending as a result of COVID-19 given latest Government

guidance and underspend arising from current method of service delivery as well as ongoing tight financial management.

21. The final details from Central Government on the income loss scheme and the spreading of collection fund (council tax and business rates) losses over the next 3 financial years are likely to be received when the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) is announced in October/November.
22. However, the most significant improvements to the council's financial position since the previous update to Cabinet has come from the assumptions made on these two schemes and their impact on the Councils finances. The spreading of the collection fund losses over three years, meaning only one year's impact must be realised this year; around £15M. The report also shows a significantly improved forecast for the home-to-school transport budget.
23. The council could potentially receive up to £10M further financial support from Central Government, but depending on how the scheme is interpreted the figure could be low as £5M. The assumptions in the Quarter 1 report therefore assumes further Government support of £6M will be received.
24. These factors reduce the projected budget deficit by around £21M compared with the previous report to Cabinet. However, it is without doubt that the way the council is operating in delivering services, the external recruitment freeze and spending controls have helped mitigate the forecast further. Aside from the impact of COVID-19, the council is reporting an £8.5M underspend.
25. The deferral of payments for over 5,000 council tax and business rate accounts have to some extent masked the impact on the collection fund, but the collection rate has reduced by around 0.9% to date. This figure is expected to deteriorate further, and when considered against a total collection fund of over £340M, this is a significant amount. The local council tax support scheme has seen a 55% increase in applications, though the council has received some Government support for this. An additional increase in October has been projected for when the furlough scheme ends and, potentially, further job losses in the economy arise.
26. The impact on the collection rate for Business Rates is to some extent masked by small businesses in receipt of Covid-19 Government support funding and reliefs.

Proposal

27. To note the update on the meeting of the Wiltshire COVID-19 Response Task Group held on 12 August 2020.

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