

**Wiltshire Council**

**Cabinet**

**8 September 2020**

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**Subject:** COVID-19 Update and steps towards recovery

**Cabinet Member:** Cllr Philip Whitehead, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Military-Civilian Integration and Communications

**Key Decision:** Non-Key

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**Executive Summary**

Delivery of Wiltshire's Recovery Plan is underway with the aims of ensuring the most vulnerable in the community continue to be supported, help is provided to local communities and businesses and that a range of measures are implemented to support health and wellbeing.

This is an update to Cabinet on developments and activity since the update provided on 18 August 2020.

**Proposal(s)**

Cabinet is asked to:

- Note the current impact of COVID-19 in Wiltshire
- Note changes in national policy
- Note the work underway within the four Recovery Coordinating Group themes and on Organisation Recovery

**Reason for Proposal(s)**

Implementation of the multi-agency Recovery Coordinating Group's Recovery Plan is successfully underway. Wiltshire Council continues to work closely with partners to deliver this in a rapidly changing environment.

**Terence Herbert**  
**Chief Executive**

## Wiltshire Council

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### Purpose of Report

1. This report provides an update on the Council's plans and activities to promote recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic since the last report to Cabinet in mid-August. A financial update is provided in a separate paper.

### Background

2. On the 21 July 2020 Wiltshire officially moved from the Response phase of the pandemic into the Recovery. The official handover from the Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) to the Recovery Coordinating Group (RCG) was received by Wiltshire Council as the chair of the RCG.
3. As of Monday 24 August 2020, 325,642 people in the UK had tested positive for COVID-19. Further information is available [online](#). The [ONS](#) suggest that as of Friday 7 August there were 56,357 registered COVID-19 deaths across the UK
4. With specific respect to Wiltshire, there have now been 1,372 people who have tested positive for COVID-19. The rate of positive cases in Wiltshire is 274.4 per 100,000 population which is lower than that seen in England which is 500 per 100,000 population. Up to the 7 August, 364 registered deaths involving COVID-19 in all settings in Wiltshire had occurred. Further information on weekly mortality is available from [ONS](#).

### Main Considerations

#### Government updates

5. The Government [announced](#) the reopening of a number of venues from 15 August, including when following COVID-secure guidance:
  - Indoor play and indoor soft play, bowling alleys, skating rinks and casinos
  - Beauty salons, tattoo studios, spas

- Indoor theatres, music and performance venues
6. Business events and conferences will be [permitted to resume from 1 October provided rates of infection remain at current levels](#).
  7. The Government has also [announced](#) the creation of a National Institute for Health Protection, responsible for protecting people from external threats to this country's health. It will combine existing talent and scientific infrastructure with the response capability of NHS Test and Trace and the analytical capability in the Joint Biosecurity Centre. The intention is that it is a national Institute that will work locally with local directors of public health and their teams and drawing upon their local insight and intelligence.

### **Local Outbreak Management Plan**

8. The Wiltshire Local Outbreak Management Plan was published in line with national guidance by 1st July 2020. Since then through a series of multi-agency exercises with over 50 attendees at each one we have exercised different elements of the plan to ensure appropriate and effective response to outbreaks in different settings can be managed.
9. The Public Health team review new cases, infection rates, testing and tracing data and outbreak data on a daily basis in Wiltshire to identify any potential outbreaks or issues at the earliest possible time. In addition, the council chairs a fortnightly multi-agency meeting of the COVID-19 health protection board where infection rates, outbreaks and updates to guidance for specific settings are reviewed to ensure that all mitigation actions for outbreaks are in place in Wiltshire.
10. Swindon remains on the Government watch list with a higher rate of COVID-19 infection. We continue to work collaboratively with Swindon Borough Council to ensure any cross-border issues can be identified in a timely manner. To aid this our public health team attend Swindon's daily outbreak meetings with other external partners.
11. There has been an outbreak of COVID-19 in a Wiltshire business which has required us to work closely with Swindon Borough Council where employees are resident. The measures implemented by the business, including the provision of free transport for the employees and topping up statutory sick pay, have been extremely successful in reducing the spread of COVID-19 associated with the outbreak.

### **Recovery**

12. The Recovery Plan endorsed by Cabinet in July sets out objectives and principles for the Recovery Coordinating Group (RCG) and similar objectives for each theme to achieve. As a reminder the main themes are:

**RCG** - Restore community, public health and wellbeing, environmental and economic resilience following the response to COVID-19.

**Economy** - Evaluate and understand the impact on Wiltshire's economy and environment, providing support to secure business recovery, revitalise town centres, reduce carbon emissions and support those impacted.

**Community Resilience** - Build on the Community Resilience shown in the response enabling Wiltshire's communities to take responsibility for their wellbeing, build positive local relationships and to get involved and take actions for what is best for their own communities.

**Care, Safeguarding & Education** - support the recovery of all age statutory and specialist services and locality-based community health & care services.

**Health and Wellbeing** - Coordinate the health and wellbeing element of the overarching recovery to COVID-19. Ensure effective local outbreak management of COVID-19

13. Each member of the RCG will also have their own organisation recovery arrangements.
14. Wiltshire Council continues to undertake activity under the Recovery programme. Some examples of the priority areas of operational activity as part of the recovery themes underway are below, and further information is provided in Appendix 1.

### **Support for Business**

15. For the first time since the COVID-19 outbreak, the Council has business rates data on business closures in Wiltshire during the pandemic. There has been a total of 361 business closures since 1st April 2020 and 94 new businesses opening during the same period. This represents a net loss of 267 businesses over 5 months.
16. In July 2020, 12,610 residents were claiming out of work benefits – a rate of 4.2% compared to a pre COVID-19 level (Jan 2020) of 1.7% which equates to 4,950 residents. Nationally the rate rose from 2.9% in January to 6.5%.
17. As at 27 August 2020, the Council has allocated £94M to over 8,000 businesses. The grant application period will close on 28 August 2020 and final payments must be made by 30 September 2020. In order to maximise the benefits of this scheme for as many Wiltshire businesses as possible, the economy team have worked to track down eligible businesses who were yet to apply for a grant and extended the discretionary grant window, to support more businesses. The grant money came in two tranches. In the first Small Business, Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business were eligible under strict criteria. 7,571 businesses were awarded a total of £90.23m. The second tranche was a discretionary fund in which 545 business were awarded a total of £3.66m.
18. The economy team are now preparing to support businesses and residents in Wiltshire, as changes that will impact on businesses take effect throughout

September and October e.g. Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, Eviction Ban, VAT resuming, and the possibility of further redundancies.

### **Safe Space Measures**

19. The Safe Space workstream covers a wide range of topics in relation to helping social distancing and active travel in public spaces, including pavement licenses and school transport.
20. Following the announcement of the Emergency Active Travel fund by the Government, the Council bid for and was successful in receiving £227k in Tranche 1 for five temporary cycleway schemes; these are in the process of being implemented. The Council has applied for funding for five further schemes in Tranche 2 to a value of £900k and is awaiting the outcome. These schemes would be permanent in nature and would primarily improve cycling provision. Other social distancing schemes have been identified and assessed, with three schemes being implemented to date within Malmesbury, Marlborough and Bradford on Avon.

### **Helping schools and educational settings**

21. We expect good attendance in schools from 1 September as we go into this with confidence building on the strong work undertaken to enable high numbers of vulnerable and keyworker children to attend school throughout the COVID-19 period. 1016 (of 1421) digital devices have been issued to vulnerable pupils to support remote learning.
22. All schools have completed risk assessments ahead of reopening in September and were supported to do so by Public Health and Education and Skills. Specific advice has also been provided to Early Years settings due to the specific issues facing younger children starting school or integrating back into nursery.
23. Significant work has been undertaken to prepare for the schools returning from 1<sup>st</sup> September. Guidance has been provided to schools, parents and transport providers on how school and public transport will operate from the start of the new term and this will continue to be reviewed in coming days and weeks. Transport is being funded via the £460,000 Government grant allocated to Wiltshire Council.
24. All school year groups and college students will have returned by w/c 7<sup>th</sup> September 2020. Additional vehicles and drivers for select routes have been commissioned, to ensure sufficient capacity is available to meet demand.
25. The current Government guidance on home to school transport states that face coverings are 'highly recommended' for use on dedicated home to school transport and the Council has adopted the government's approach. We have recommended that everyone who can wear a face covering should do so on home to school transport arranged by the Council if they are over the age of 11

years. There is no requirement for primary aged pupils or children who are exempt to wear one, although it is strongly recommended.

26. Exam results are being collated and the Education Employment Advisors have been busy supporting students with next steps post 16, as well as making contact with those young people whose destination was unknown, resulting in our overall unknown figure improving from 5.3% in June to 4.14% at the end of July.

### **Supporting Care Providers and Discharge from Hospital**

27. Providing support to our adult social care providers, especially care homes, has been a priority for the Council during the COVID-19 response and continues in recovery. A COVID-19 team was established in early April to provide a single point of contact for all providers with a helpline operating seven days a week and is now operating six days a week. In partnership with the Clinical Commissioning Group and Care Quality Commission, the Council has run regular webinars for children's and adults care providers, including specialist webinars on how to use Personal Protective Equipment and managing infection prevention and control. The Council has also provided guidance on the commencement of visiting in care homes regularly reviewed at the Health Protection Board and is also working with those providers which want to reopen day centres.
28. The Council has provided financial support to providers during the COVID-19 response, paying full costs for PPE, costs for staff who are self-isolating and additional running costs due to the pandemic. Funding totalling £7.5 million will be provided to support infection prevention and control measures. Care homes will receive £4.7 million with £2.8 million going to supported living providers and domiciliary care agencies. This has been paid in two equal instalments with 50% in June and the remainder before September.
29. The Health and Care workstream has been focused on the national guidance which has been published in this period and the Phase 3 letter received by the BSW CCG with a focus on restoring services and preparing for winter pressures. The Council continues to manage Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) on behalf of the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Resilience Forum and has good supplies.

### **Return to the Workplace**

30. Government guidance on returning to the workplace changed on 1 August and requires employers to consult with their employees to determine how to work safely. The guidance is clear that working from home is one way to do this, but that workplaces can also be made safe by following COVID-19 Secure guidelines.
31. Steps to ensure the Council's workplaces are COVID-19 secure took place in June as lockdown measures began to ease and means that capacity in all buildings is reduced. In the three in hubs this is by approx. 50% and means that

the staff capacity in these buildings has reduced from around 1600 to 800.

32. During the response to the pandemic a requirement to work at home has in the main applied to staff who are normally office based and work predominantly from one of the Council's three main hubs. For other staff, they have continued to work in and from their normal workplaces and some cases where it has been essential for service delivery this has been from the three hubs.
33. Advice from Public Health continues to be to work at home wherever possible and this approach enables us to ensure social distancing within all of our workplaces, keeping the staff who are delivering our essential services and customers accessing our services in our workplaces, as safe as possible.
34. Processes to support staff to return to the workplace in services where this is deemed essential, have been in place since June. More recently a process to allow staff "ad hoc" access to workplaces assessed as COVID-secure has also been confirmed and communicated. These ad hoc requests are for the completion of specific tasks that cannot be done at home, or in some cases where working at home is temporarily unavailable (internet down etc).
35. A staff wellbeing and engagement survey in June indicated that for some groups of staff, working from home for a prolonged period of time is adversely affecting their wellbeing. As a result, a process is now in place to enable staff to access their workplace for wellbeing reasons.
36. The number of staff returning to the workplace continues to increase but it is not anticipated that staff will return to the workplace in any greater numbers for the remainder of 2020 while social distancing measures remain in place. The next steps for return to workplace will be led through the Organisation Recovery Programme to ensure they are aligned with the future vision for the council. Further information, including the current numbers of staff returning to work in the hubs is in Appendix 1.

### **Overview and Scrutiny Engagement**

37. Overview and Scrutiny (OS) engagement on the council's response to COVID-19 and recovery is being led by OS Management Committee and its Wiltshire COVID-19 Response Task Group. Reports to Cabinet on the COVID-19 situation receive prior scrutiny by the Task Group, with its comments being reported to Cabinet by its chairman.
38. At its meeting on 17 August the OS Management Committee reviewed the arrangements for overview and scrutiny during recovery and agreed:
  - The formal meetings of Children's, Environment and Health Select Committee scheduled for September to be deferred, with the position to be reviewed by OS Management Committee at its next meeting on 29 September, taking into account the COVID-19 situation.
  - Full Council approval for the continuance of the streamlined OS

arrangements in place to be sought in October 2020.

- Additional public meetings of OS Management Committee to be scheduled if appropriate to ensure ongoing public scrutiny.
- Wiltshire COVID-19 Response Task Group to continue to meet, but more frequently and receiving additional information beyond the regular Recovery reports to Cabinet on request.
- Members of the Financial Planning Task Group to continue to be invited to attend meetings of the Wiltshire COVID-19 Response Task Group to support ongoing financial scrutiny.
- The select committees to continue to be supported to meet informally with their members invited to raise any issues via their committee chairman for raising at the Wiltshire COVID-19 Response Task Group. Officers and Executive members may attend if appropriate, with the OS chairmen and vice-chairman to discuss the most appropriate support for their committee with the Chief Executive and CLT.

### **Safeguarding Implications**

39. Safeguarding implications have been fully considered as part of the work to support residents shielding and identified by the NHS as Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) through the Wiltshire Wellbeing Hub and coordinated via the Community Resilience Theme. This work has transitioned to resilience Recovery Theme. The Care, Safeguarding & Education recovery theme is addressing safeguarding across adults and children including domestic abuse. The health and well-being theme will ensure recovery for mental health, learning disabilities, rough sleepers and substance misuse.
40. Families & Children's Services has continued to meet all the statutory duties in children's social care. Performance has remained strong with visiting performance at 98% and 96% for child protection and looked after children at the end of August. Child protection conferences and looked after children reviews have continued throughout the pandemic using Microsoft Teams to ensure these meetings are COVID-19 secure. Adult social care have also continued to meet all the statutory duties throughout this period.

### **Public Health Implications**

41. This has been referred to throughout the report.

### **Procurement Implications**

42. A sequential approach to supplier relief has been agreed, ensuring that suppliers access central Government support where possible first and work with us on an open book basis when necessary.

### **Equalities Impact of the Proposal**



43. Work is progressing to understand the impact of the pandemic on those with protected characteristics. The Council continues working with partners across Wiltshire, to ensure that those most vulnerable in the community are supported through this incident. Equality implications are being considered as part of decisions made and in interim changes to service delivery. Recovery theme leads are also embedding use of a Health Equality Assessment Tool.
44. The Community Resilience theme working with partners is leading on work to enable Wiltshire's communities to be cohesive places where difference is celebrated. This ensures inequalities in Wiltshire created or made worse by COVID-19 are addressed. A plan is being developed to tackle issues caused by COVID-19 in specific groups (including the black and minority ethnic community, gypsies and travellers, carers and those with a disability).

### **Environmental and Climate Change Considerations**

45. A new Climate Strategy will be developed in the coming year to set out how the council is going to meet its challenging targets to become carbon neutral by 2030. The Climate Strategy will outline the steps the council needs to take to improve its resilience to climate change impacts in Wiltshire. As part of developing the strategy, each Recovery Theme will need to consider the environmental impact of its activities and identify opportunities to contribute to a green recovery. The council will be taking part in the Wiltshire Climate Alliance virtual conference this month, to discuss a green recovery in Wiltshire, and will carefully consider the suggestions that come out of these discussions.

### **Risk Management**

46. Wiltshire Council specific risks related to the management of, and recovery from, COVID-19 are owned and regularly reviewed by the Chief Executive.
47. A new partnership risk register is being prepared for the RCG. This will comprise of some risks that transferred from the response phase as well as new risks identified by each of the themes. Risks will be managed in Themes on separate registers with an escalation procedure for significant risks to be reviewed by the RCG. The RCG will adopt Wiltshire Council's risks management processes.
48. Wiltshire Council's Performance and Risk Management reporting will resume for quarter two 2020/21 and the Council's own strategic Risk Register will reflect, to some extent, the risks being managed by the RCG.

### **Section 151 Officer Commentary**

49. An update on the financial implications and latest outturn is presented in a separate report.

## **Legal and Governance**

50. The RCG as a collective does not have the power to direct the Council to act in any particular way or provide resources.
51. Therefore, the Council's normal decision-making arrangements, as set out in its Constitution apply. This means that any significant policy matters will be determined by Council, Cabinet, individual Cabinet Members or Committees as appropriate and officers will make operational decisions within the Scheme of Delegation to Officers. Overview and Scrutiny arrangements are summarised in paragraphs 37 and 38 above.
52. Other representatives on the RCG will be authorised in accordance with their own organisation's governance arrangements. Where these apply across more than one organisation e.g. health and social care, steps will be taken to ensure that these operate efficiently and effectively within the overall governance framework of the RCG. The RCG has established a Governance Task Group to streamline partnership governance arrangements related to Wiltshire Recovery themes to avoid duplication of effort and address gaps.
53. The latest decision notices for executive decisions made by officers under delegated authority in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are available [online](#).

## **Workforce Implications**

54. Government guidance about employment matters has been applied throughout the COVID-19 response and will continue through recovery.
55. A COVID-19 policy implemented in March 2020 sets out information for staff, including the application of policies and procedures to support response, and the organisation recovery programme will continue to review and update this in consultation the trade unions.
56. The organisation recovery programme structure includes a workforce theme that will assess, evaluate and review the way in which the workforce operated during lockdown so that we can embed some of the positive changes and identify further opportunities to deliver services differently.

## **Conclusions**

57. The Council is taking a systems approach to recovery and are working with our partners and the LGA to deliver this work successfully in a rapidly changing environment.

**Terence Herbert**  
**Chief Executive**

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1<sup>st</sup> September 2020

**Appendices**

Appendix 1: Updates from Recovery Theme Leads