



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

West Oxfordshire District Council

Name and date of Committee	Council: Wednesday 28 October 2020
Report Number	Agenda Item No. 12
Subject	Covid-19: West Oxfordshire Recovery Plan
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr James Mills, Leader; Email: James.Mills@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Tel: 01993 861613; Email: Giles.Hughes@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To outline a draft plan for the Council's approach to recovery from the impacts of Covid-19 in terms of both its leadership role working with West Oxfordshire's communities and the Council's own functioning.
Annex	Annex A : Draft Recovery Plan
Recommendation	That Council considers whatever recommendation is made by Cabinet at its meeting on 21 October 2020 in relation to the draft Recovery Plan attached as Annex A to this report.
Corporate priorities	All. The Draft Recovery Plan complements the Council's key corporate strategy document (The Council Plan 2020-2024).
Key Decision	N/A
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	Internal consultation with officers, Cabinet and with a wider group of Councillors through a Cabinet Advisory Group convened specifically to provide insight and inform the recovery effort. A wider Councillor session was also held to outline the formative approach towards a Recovery Plan.

I. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The Council received a report on Covid-19: West Oxfordshire Response and Recovery at its meeting on 24 June 2020. The Council meeting approved the recommendation that the Chief Executive be requested to prepare a Local Recovery Plan for West Oxfordshire for consideration at Cabinet and then Council in October 2020. This agenda paper is now brought forward in fulfilment of that recommendation.
- 1.2. The Council's meeting in June 2020 also approved the recommendation that a Cabinet Advisory Group be established to advise Cabinet on the development of the Recovery Plan, on the basis outlined in the supporting paper on the meeting agenda. Following the approval of this recommendation, a Cabinet Advisory Group has been convened and its insights have informed the development of the Draft Recovery Plan at [Annex A](#).
- 1.3. The report to Council in June 2020 outlined that Covid-19 has caused profound changes to every part of life in the UK. Many of these changes and impacts still prevail and the pandemic is and will continue to have a prolonged effect.
- 1.4. The June 2020 report outlined our response in terms of maintaining essential Council services; working with voluntary and community groups to help mobilise support for local people (in particular – shielded and vulnerable residents); and ensuring a flow of financial support through business grants paid to businesses in the District. It remains possible that the Council will need to pivot back to organising a response and community support effort should challenges re-emerge as the course of the pandemic develops.
- 1.5. As time advances, the challenges (and opportunities) presented due to Covid-19 will require a planned but dynamic and flexible response. The Council will need to balance maintaining core services, whilst delivering appropriate community support and moving through planning and implementing recovery actions.
- 1.6. This report and the draft Recovery Plan included in [Annex A](#) are to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 21 October 2020, and the recommendations arising from that meeting will be included in the associated draft minutes, which are expected to be published on Friday 23 October. It should in any event be noted that the shaded text on [page 11](#) differs from that which was included in the document circulated for the Cabinet meeting. This is not a material change – the text has been slightly reworked to make clear the data source, and that it relates to consumer-spending emissions only / Lloyds customers.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1. Recovery from Covid-19 will take time and will be complex – reflecting the multi-faceted nature of the impacts created by the crisis. The purpose of the Draft Local Recovery Plan is to provide a suitable framework to help guide our recovery effort. The Draft Local Recovery Plan is brought forward now, at this early stage, so that the steer can inform the preparation of the budget for 2021/22 and guide our recovery activity.
- 2.2. A key part of our future work will be collaborative efforts with partner organisations and the Council will need to both influence others and adapt its own approach as part of joint initiatives to achieve useful outcomes. The Local Recovery Plan is not intended to be a static document that is fixed as a statement at a given date. Rather, it is set out as a framework that will be further developed with appropriate partner inputs, insights from supporting analysis and further consultation with Councillors on given work themes.
- 2.3. There will be different phases in the recovery activity. The phases recognise that initial activity will lead into longer term actions to ensure a proper recovery. The June 2020 Council report envisaged a preliminary re-start phase (0-6 months), succeeded by a recover phase (6-18 months) and a renew phase (18-36 months+).

- 2.4. The scope for advancing through the recovery stages will hinge to some degree on the extent to which a significant second wave of the pandemic occurs and the community/ economic impacts that this delivers. It is possible that we will be cast back into a community response and support mode and our scope to facilitate recovery actions may be circumscribed, particularly given the fact that staff capacity is finite.
- 2.5. A further reason for a phased approach to recovery is to enable West Oxfordshire's recovery plans to link with those of our partners. Our Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) and other Oxfordshire partners will be basing their own recovery plans on the phased approach outlined above and is important to link into this wider work.

Developing the Draft Recovery Plan

- 2.6. The Council adopted a statement of its corporate policy and priorities (the Council Plan 2020-2024) at the start of the year (Council meeting: 22 January 2020). The approach established in the Council Plan has set a context for the development of thinking relating to the Recovery Plan. The agreed policy in the Council Plan has been used as a backdrop against which areas of work have been further considered in terms of whether amended or supplementary actions are now required in the light of the pandemic.
- 2.7. Following the Council's meeting in June 2020, a Cabinet Advisory Group (CAG) was convened to help guide the development of a Draft Recovery Plan. The CAG has met several times and it has considered policy areas that relate back to Council priorities. The workshop sessions have focused on: climate change; economy; community; and Council/ Finances. The CAG workshops and Councillors' expression of policy concerns have informed the Draft Recovery Plan presented now.
- 2.8. In addition to the CAG sessions, a further Councillor meeting was convened on 24 September (open to all Councillors) to share the emerging recovery proposals with a broader group and to further enhance engagement around the forming work programme. The outcomes of this further session in terms of work priorities have then been reviewed in a final CAG session held on 8 October.
- 2.9. The purpose of the lead officers' joint working with the CAG has been to advise on the development of the recovery work strands and to help inform our approach. The recovery proposal is now brought forward for Cabinet's recommendation in terms of a Draft Recovery Plan. It is intended that the Recovery Plan provides a suitable framework to help guide a recovery effort that is consistent with the priorities established in the Council Plan.
- 2.10. The work to develop the Draft Recovery Plan has been informed through a cross section of lead officers from various functions and a focus has been given to identifying the resources required to advance work on relevant themes. Councillors and officers are keenly aware of the scope for collaboration with partners where this brings advantages (economies, learning and joint action etc.) but are also conscious of the need to focus effort and resource on achieving desired outcomes for West Oxfordshire's communities. The resources to be deployed to deliver the Recovery Plan are in the main additional staffing which is required to give the capacity that is necessary.
- 2.11. The programme of work outlined can be divided into two parts. Firstly, work that has been given a recommended priority ranking through Councillor engagement and that, once approved, can be commenced as funding can be made available. Secondly, areas of ambition where initiatives are on hold and further steps will be taken if external finance can be assembled or future opportunities arise and the effort can be extended at a later date.
- 2.12. The Plan extends work already underway in addressing Council Plan priorities and it complements related strategies. Examples of related strategy work are included elsewhere on this agenda (Investment Strategy; and Carbon Action Plan).

- 2.13. It is important to recognise that the pandemic is an unfolding situation and the challenges presented are changing through time. In parallel with this, the Council's partners (including the statutory/ voluntary sector bodies and the Local Enterprise Partnership) are forming appropriate recovery work and the District Council will need to adapt and flex in various collaborative joint efforts. The Draft Recovery Plan on this agenda item sets a framework – it will need to be dynamic and develop so that it remains fit for purpose.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1. The proposed action set out in the Draft Recovery Plan has been informed by the Council's budget situation. A focus has been devoted to prioritising the range of proposed work so that the cost of this (£643,000) can, subject to approval, be financed by £550,000 set aside for this purpose in earmarked reserves from the 2019/20 outturn with the remaining £93,000 taken from General Reserves. The detail of the proposed costs is shown in the table below.

Funding made available for Recovery Plan:	
Market Towns Officer (2 yrs)	£90k
Network of Wellbeing Hubs (project)	£50k
Economic Development Assistant (2 yrs)	£63k
Specialist Business Case Developer (2 yrs)	£90k
Climate Change Manager extension (2 yrs)	£99k
Carbon Action Plan Officer (2 yrs)	£73k
Biodiversity/Countryside Land Mgmt. Officer (2 yrs)	£81k
Development Mgmt. Sustainability Specialist (1 yr)	£52k
Active Lives Role (1 yr)	£45k
TOTAL	£643K
Initiatives to be pursued when external finance can be assembled, or future opportunities arise:	
Dedicated youth support analysis (2 yrs)	£39k
Organisational Development for local groups (1 yr)	£10k
Economic Development Projects fund (2 yrs)	£60k
Homelessness Prevention Role (2 yrs)	£64k
Community Builder pilots (2 yrs)	£34k
Grants Review Cross Departmental Role (2 yrs)	£74k

- 3.2. It is recognised that the breadth of the challenge facing the Council and the District's communities will necessitate leveraging resources from external finance and investment. A key element of the work programme set out here is designed to build the capacity of the

Council and its partners to access external finance and maximise the resources that can be brought into play for the benefit of the local area.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1. None at this stage.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

5.1. The purpose of the Recovery Plan is to direct effort towards priority issues and this should help ensure that resources are focused on effective recovery action. Any significant actions will be subject to the Council's corporate risk management approach and will, therefore, be tested in terms of risk likelihood, potential impact and the identification of appropriate risk mitigation.

6. EQUALITIES IMPACT

6.1. The pursuit of a Recovery Plan as outlined should have a positive effect in terms of its equalities impact. The Recovery Plan is intended to help secure positive outcomes that help further the policy priorities set out in the Council Plan. The Council Plan itself was developed from a significant evidence base that informed the focus on policy themes and helped ensure an inclusive corporate plan. It will be appropriate to undertake relevant further assessment of equalities issues where new strategic action is formed.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

7.1. The programme of work designed to address the climate change agenda forms part of the Council Plan and the Draft Recovery Plan. This work seeks to protect and enhance the environment by taking local action on climate change and biodiversity.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

8.1. The Council could choose not to prepare a Recovery Plan.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1. None.

West Oxfordshire Covid-19 Recovery Plan (October 2020)

In June 2020 Council moved to prepare a Local Recovery Plan to complement the delivery of the Council Plan 2020-24 through the Covid-19 Recovery Themes of Economy, Community, Climate and Council, Service Delivery and Finance. These are closely aligned with the six Council Plan priorities to ensure that actions prioritised as part of the Covid recovery will also positively contribute to the achievement of the Council Plan (see [Table 1](#)).

The 'live' status of the Recovery Plan reflects the agile approach required of the Council to be able to target its efforts and resources to achieve the Council Plan Vision to be 'fit for the future' through being proactive at addressing new challenges as the Council and District recovers from the impacts of the pandemic. It enables us to be flexible to take up opportunities to work with other partners as they arise and not be constrained by delivering a set of rigid prescriptive targets. Our recovery work will need to flex and adapt as the activity of our partner organisations (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and others) forms and we shape what our role is in this collaborative effort. The task of recovering from the pandemic will be iterative and a 'dynamic' Covid-19 Recovery Plan will assist the Council to focus resources and effort to those opportunities as they arise over the years it will take to support a district wide recovery from the pandemic.

The Recovery Plan sets out how the Council will invest resources in achieving the aims identified for each Covid-19 Recovery Theme. The programme of work outlined across the themes can be divided into two parts. Firstly, work that has been given "recommended priority" ranking through Councillor engagement will be commenced at this early phase of the recovery as funding is in place. Secondly, "areas of ambition" where initiatives will be progressed when further finance can be assembled or alternative avenues for resourcing these initiatives are secured. See [Appendix 1](#) – Covid-19 Recovery Delivery and Project Investment Schedule.

Table 1 – Covid-19 Recovery Theme	Related Council Plan Priorities
<i>Economy</i>	<i><u>A Vibrant District Economy</u></i> - Securing future economic success through supporting existing local businesses and attracting new businesses to deliver the economic ambitions of the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy.
<i>Community</i>	<i><u>Healthy Towns and Villages</u></i> - Facilitating healthy lifestyles and better well being for everyone. <i><u>Strong Local Communities</u></i> - Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities. <i><u>Meeting the Housing Needs of our Changing Population</u></i> - Securing the provision of market and affordable housing of a high quality for the wide range of householders making their home in West Oxfordshire.
<i>Climate</i>	<i><u>Climate Action</u></i> - Leading the way in protecting and enhancing the environment by taking action locally on climate change and biodiversity.
<i>Council, Service Delivery and Finance</i>	<i><u>Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance</u></i> - Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council.

Covid-19 Recovery Theme - Economy

Related Council Plan Priority: *A Vibrant District Economy: 'Securing future economic success through supporting existing local businesses and attracting new businesses to deliver the economic ambitions of the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy'*.

West Oxfordshire benefits from a diverse economy that is represented by many sectors ranging from high tech and advanced manufacturing to retail and the visitor economy. The COVID-19 lockdown has impacted different sectors to varying degrees and in different ways. The Council acknowledges that the economic recovery from the pandemic will require an equally varied and nuanced response to reflect this diversity. The Council also recognises the challenges ahead in terms of recovery to pre-Covid turnover; how the economy will fare once Government support for businesses and individuals ceases and the impact of the uncertainty surrounding the unknown outcome of the Government's Brexit negotiations with the EU on a trade deal. Equally, the Council is acutely aware of the impact this economic turmoil has had on rising unemployment rates and the impact that this has on individuals, their families and the communities they are part of.

In response to the challenges outlined above, the Council is an active partner of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership who is developing a County wide Economic Recovery Plan. Supplementary to this involvement, the Council identifies the following Economic Covid-19 Recovery Aims which will guide its proactive response to the specific economic recovery needs for the District.

Economy – Covid-19 Recovery Aims:

The following are proposed as high-level economic objectives for the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis:

- Recover to better than before.
- Re-imagine our town centres and high streets so they remain vibrant service centres for the local population and visitors alike.
- Ensure there is a robust support structure for all stages of business but particularly for those people setting up a business or going self-employed for the first time.
- Ensure training is available to re-skill those who have lost jobs and to help growing businesses recruit local people.
- Ensure that the district plays a full part in Oxfordshire's 'Innovation Ecosystem' as part of the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy, and as part of the wider Oxford to Cambridge Arc.
- Be clear about the Council's role in different parts of the economic recovery process, whether this be to lead, partner with others or influence initiatives.
- Ensure that adequate resources are available so the Council can achieve what it sets out to do.
- Ensure that every decision and initiative takes into account and tries to minimise its environmental impact.

Economy – Covid-19 Recovery Delivery and Investment

The Council is committed to ensuring that West Oxfordshire's economy recovers from the pandemic and associated lockdowns. The Council aspires to an economy which is stronger than it was before the pandemic, ensuring relevant initiatives contribute to the delivery of the Council's climate ambitions and recognises that to do this investment is needed to bring this economic progress to fruition.

The Council commits to ongoing investment in the coordination, facilitation and delivery of action in the following key priority areas:

- To support the recovery and longer term vitality and viability of the market towns – including, for example, the development of individual plans for each town to protect and enhance their commercial hearts; support for the establishment of town recovery groups; securing external investment into the District; maximising the commercial benefit of the Council's own property and supporting town centre businesses.
- To ensure that business support is available to all stages and sectors of business, delivered either directly or in partnership with other organisations, both local and national, and including Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership.
- To ensure that the right skills training opportunities are available locally to match local people to jobs and to support those organisations, including Job Centre Plus, Abingdon and Witney College and the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership skills team that are delivering this.
- To support the recovery of the visitor economy – including, for example, working with the sector to repurpose it for the domestic market and driving the projects which will have a significant impact on the visitor economy including The Mullin Automotive Park and redevelopment of Eynsham Hall.
- To ensure that the Council plays its part in delivering the ambition of the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy to be a 'top 3 global innovation ecosystem' by 2040. This will require the Council to actively build on its strengths and pursue local economic development opportunities including the Garden Village Science Park and a potential Carterton Technology Hub.

Covid-19 Recovery Theme - Communities

Related Council Plan Priorities:

Healthy Towns and Villages: 'Facilitating healthy lifestyles and better wellbeing for everyone.'

Strong Local Communities: 'Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities'.

Meeting the Housing Needs of our Changing Population: 'Securing the provision of market and affordable housing of a high quality for the wide range of householders making their home in West Oxfordshire.'

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on our District at the individual, household and community level. The ongoing and unpredictable nature of this public health emergency and its impacts on the health and wellbeing of communities present challenges for recovery. The emergency has seen an inspiring grassroots level response which together with the Council's own Response Hub supported many individuals and households through this extremely difficult period. There are opportunities to build on these collaborative efforts with the Voluntary and Community Sector.

The health and wellbeing of our communities are impacted by a wide range of factors including housing, environment, employment and education and the work of the Council touches many of these determinants. This is reflected in the themes of this Recovery Plan and the following set of community recovery aims which will steer its efforts towards improved health and wellbeing locally as we recover from Covid-19.

Communities – Covid-19 Recovery Aims

- Build on increased opportunities to listen to, involve and engage residents in the Council's work.
- Prevent decline and reduce isolation by connecting people to places and each other.
- Establish strengths based approaches as a mode of operation across Council services.
- Work locally to find sustainable ways to retain and further develop new neighbourhood responses.
- Improve the way we invest our resources to make the biggest difference to areas and people in greatest need.
- Work hard to increase external investment into the district and increase capacity.
- Work to develop a more connected system so that people have better physical access to services and awareness of them.
- Co-produce and collaborate with the Voluntary and Community sector (VCS) locally more effectively to improve services and better manage resources.
- Improve local visibility and achieve greater contact with communities.
- Innovate and use existing resources and influence to shape places to best meet the needs of the community.

Communities – Covid-19 Recovery Delivery and Investment

The Council is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of the communities it serves and pledges to invest in taking an active role in this effort. An initial phase of investment will bring forward two strands of activity:

- Explore the scope for the development of a network of Wellbeing hubs across the District. It is hoped that this could result in a range of providers, including other Councils, working together to provide a mix of services including advice, housing and welfare support in a variety of formats and locations across the district.
- Focus on helping people, especially those who are alone or who have long term health conditions, to improve levels of physical activity and build up their confidence. Movement amongst these individuals has been particularly restricted by the pandemic and they are at particular risk of physical decline. The Council recognises that this physical decline may lead to complications associated with frailty and demands on the NHS and wishes to mitigate against this.

In addition to these two strands of activity, a further set of five initiatives have been identified which will be progressed should external finance, or alternative means to resource these, be found:

- **Youth support & district-wide needs analysis** – to develop a comprehensive understanding of the priorities that young people identify as important to them in order to ensure that services and infrastructure provision meets their needs. Covid-19 has had a significant impact on young people in terms of their education, employment options, development opportunities and social skills. Engaging with young people directly and working with other youth organisations will make a positive contribution at a critical time.
- **Homelessness Prevention** – to engage with and provide early assistance to those at risk of homelessness in a bid to avoid the damaging and costly consequences of homelessness. The Council recognises that the risk of homelessness on individuals, and therefore the Council in associated costs, will be significant over the short to medium term as Government support for employees ends, unemployment rates increase, debt levels increase and eviction suspensions end which may put an increased number of people at risk of homelessness.
- **Community Building** – To work directly with communities facing particular challenges and work with residents to develop solutions to those challenges and build confidence.
- **Organisational Development Support** - To provide dedicated support for community groups in West Oxfordshire to secure their long term sustainability and so that the Council and its communities can benefit from the groups activity.
- **Centralised Grants Function (including Grants Review)** – To better coordinate the Council's grants process in order to achieve improved efficiency, consistency and impact. The review should give consideration to lessons learnt through Covid-19 and test whether funding priorities are correct in light of this or if other needs have emerged that require grant support as a priority.

Covid-19 Recovery Theme - Climate

Related Council Plan Priority: *Climate Action: 'Leading the way in protecting and enhancing the environment by taking action locally on climate change and biodiversity.*

A Carbon Trust study using data from three million Lloyds customers noted a sharp decline in consumer spending between March and July as a consequence of lockdown. This resulted in a fall in carbon emissions equivalent to an estimated 4.3 million tonnes, 27% lower than in the same period in 2019. The Covid-19 pandemic also highlighted the value that local communities place on our natural environment, underlining the value of the Council's work following its declaration of a climate and ecological emergency in June 2019. This Recovery Plan sets out the following aims which seek to strengthen the Council's existing commitment to implementing its ambitions for climate by further reflecting the importance of a green recovery within them. These aims are not intended to replace the Council's current plans, but instead further those ambitions within the context of its plans for recovery from Covid-19 building upon the increased awareness and taking the opportunity to create a lower carbon future.

Climate – Covid-19 Recovery Aims:

- Aspire to achieving the highest environmental standards, embedding climate-conscious decisions, in everything we do.
- Reduce, replace and offset the Council's total CO₂e by delivering the Carbon Action Plan, working towards a target of carbon neutral by 2030.
- Facilitate partnership activities for widespread energy retrofit to reduce CO₂e as a District.
- Research and facilitate investment opportunities in green energy, supporting a Council and District transition across to low- and zero-emission energy.
- Deliver the highest sustainability standards in future development planning considerations.
- Contribute to the take up of green and active travel through partnerships across the District and County.
- Protect and enhance the value of existing open space and facilitate the creation of new natural landscapes that offer co-benefits for people and wildlife.
- Reduce waste at source and encourage recycling.
- Reduce water consumption through water efficiency and recycling measures across the Council's assets and portfolio.

The Council is committed to implementing its ambitions for climate through:

- A Carbon Action Plan for the Council, setting out the trajectory for how to become carbon neutral Council by 2030.
- A Climate Change Strategy setting out the Council's objectives and plans working across District in delivering climate action.
- A Biodiversity Plan defining the Council's next steps in facilitating a nature recovery.

Climate – Covid-19 Recovery Delivery and Investment

The Council is committed to ensuring that the strategies above will be translated into action to ensure that climate ambitions are met and that the value of our natural environment which has become so evident through the Covid-19 pandemic to our local communities is safeguarded and enhanced.

This commitment will be realised in the immediate term through:

- Investment in the coordination and delivery across service areas, departments and with external organisations and stakeholders of the Council's Carbon Action Plan, Climate Change Strategy and Biodiversity Plan.
- Implementation of the Sustainability Standards Checklist through which all planning applications will be required to demonstrate how exemplary standards of sustainability outlined within the checklist are being met in response to the following issues: Water use and flood risk; Biodiversity; Green and Active Travel; Aligning with Net-Zero Carbon; Sustainable Construction, Materials and Waste and Voluntary Standards for Sustainability.
- Investment in coordination and delivery of positive land management of Council owned sites for the benefit of people and wildlife in response to the ecological emergency. This will ensure that land management plans and ecological appraisal work currently underway delivers benefits that both conserve and enhance the ecological condition of the Council's own land, thus ensuring that our commitment to the ecological emergency is realised.

Covid-19 Recovery Theme - Council, Service Delivery and Finance

Related Council Plan Priority: *Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance:*

Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council.

The Council views the significant period of change resulting from Covid-19 as an opportunity to reconsider how the Council is organised from a democratic/governance and service delivery perspective as well as to review the financial context within which the Council finds itself and how that will support or constrain the Council moving forward.

From a governance perspective the major issues facing the Council have been in respect of postponed elections and cancelled normal business meetings including Council and Scrutiny, use of technology to facilitate recovery and the impact of proposed government policies such as devolution and planning reforms.

From a service delivery perspective the issues facing the Council have been continuity of service delivery when face to face interaction and office bases were largely unavailable, reconfiguring the workforce to provide an immediate response to the lockdown emergency and responding to the increased demand from residents for alternative contact/access channels – telephone, website etc.

From a financial perspective the issues facing the Council have involved understanding the scale and length of the financial impact of the emergency on the Council, managing any projected shortfall in the short term and understanding any long term financial impacts of Covid-19.

In addition, careful consideration has been given to how the Council can invest to realise the aims identified under each of the Covid-19 Recovery Themes and ensure that the Council takes a catalytic role to help the District recover from the pandemic so that it is 'fit for the future' over the longer term.

Council, Service Delivery and Finance – Covid-19 Recovery Aims:

Through consideration of the Council's governance, service delivery challenges and financial context, a set of Covid-19 recovery aims for each of these issues have been identified:

Council Aims

- Scope for future webcasting of Meetings.
- Review of future use of the Council Chamber including consideration of more multi-functional use of the asset to support hybrid meetings.
- Increase cross-agency working to deliver benefits for the District.
- Review of Council constitution and committee structure (less immediate priority).

Service Delivery Aims

- Explore how the Council can embed the benefits of home / agile working benefits for staff.
- Improve the Council's understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on employee welfare.
- Audit and review Council office space requirements and plan for the future use of these assets.

- Improve communication and enforcement of Covid-19 safeguarding requirements with the resident and business community and visitors to the District.

Finance Aims

- Identify opportunities for increased income generation and, where there is scope, reduce expenditure in response to longer term budget shortfalls forecast in the medium term financial strategy.
- Identify, evaluate and pursue investments that will align with Council priorities, as set out the Council Plan and the Recovery Plan, that deliver future revenue streams to secure the Council's long term ability to serve the district.
- Identify and secure external grant funding to enable the Council to deliver additional services to the District without reliance on the availability of Council budget.

Council, Service Delivery and Finance – Covid-19 Recovery Delivery and Investment

The Council, in recognition of the importance of ensuring that as a democratically elected organisation it can best serve West Oxfordshire through the recovery and beyond, is committed to financing two work streams which will respond to the aims outlined above:

- Fund a programme of investment appraisals in order to identify, generate, evaluate and pursue investment opportunities (including further exploring the opportunity to promote and expand our 'charged for' services). This will enable us to provide long term income streams with the purpose of closing the Council's longer term budget gap and enabling the Council to pursue delivery of its ambitions.
- Pursue available external grants to deliver projects that benefit the District – these may be Covid-19 recovery related and/or those which will deliver on the Council Plan. By investing resources to prepare and submit business cases to external grant funds the Council will be able to deliver 'more for less' by securing revenue which would not be available from within existing constrained budgets.

Appendix I – Covid-19 Recovery Delivery and Project Investment Schedule

The Council committed funds from its 19/20 surplus to meeting the aims of this Recovery Plan. As noted, Councillor engagement has given a recommended priority ranking and identified nine funded fixed term roles which will bring the required activity to fruition:

Role/Project

Market Towns Officer (2 yrs)

Network of Wellbeing Hubs (project)

Economic Development Assistant (2 yrs)

Specialist Business Case Developer (2 yrs)

Climate Change Manager extension (2 yrs)

Carbon Action Plan Officer (2 yrs)

Biodiversity/Countryside Land Mgmt. Officer (2 yrs)

Development Mgmt. Sustainability Specialist (1 yr)

Active Lives Role (1 yr)

A further six initiatives are endorsed and will be pursued when further finance can be assembled or future opportunities arise to recognise these areas of ambition:

Role/Project

Dedicated youth support analysis (2 yrs)

Organisational Development for local groups (1 yr)

Economic Development Projects fund (2 yrs)

Homelessness Prevention Role (2 yrs)

Community Builder pilots (2 yrs)

Grants Review Cross Departmental Role (2 yrs)