

Information/Discussion Paper

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 2 November 2020

Covid-19 Recovery Programme

Why has this come to scrutiny?

This has come to scrutiny at the request of the Chair's Group, to be updated on the Council's recovery work. This note contains the information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the recovery programme.

Summary of the Issue

Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) was one of the first councils to launch its Recovery Strategy, which sets out a framework to guide its recovery efforts. The purpose of this briefing paper is to summarise the recovery work done as well as key risks to recovery. The CBC Recovery Strategy can be accessed via the following link -

https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/downloads/file/8162/recovery_strategy

This briefing note will summarise recovery efforts in the following workstreams:

- Economy
- Returning CBC to a new normal
- Community & Volunteers
- Environment & Wellbeing
- Finance
- Risks to recovery

Recovery Governance:

The CBC governance structure for recovery is summarised below:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| • Cabinet Lead: | Cllr Steve Jordan |
| • ELT Sponsor: | Darren Knight |
| • Economy: | Tracey Crews |
| • Returning CBC to a new normal: | Ann Wolstencroft |
| • Community & Volunteers: | Richard Gibson |
| • Environment & Wellbeing: | Mike Redman |
| • Finance: | Paul Jones |

It's important to note that CBC is not operating in isolation in terms of its recovery efforts but working with key partners across Gloucestershire including GFirstLEP, Cheltenham BID, VCS and the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) with the Council's Executive Director for People & Change being the Vice Chair of the LRF recovery cell.

Emergency Response and Recovery:

In most emergency response situations, as the response phase begins to end the recovery phase will commence. The challenge of Covid-19 is that we are still supporting the response phase as well as commencing recovery efforts and we may have to scale resources back up for that as cases rise. This provides even more challenges as resources and efforts are split between the two phases; this illustrates one of the many unique challenges from Covid-19.

Summary of evidence/information by recovery workstream

Workstream - Economy:

Test and Trace Support payment scheme:

CBC has rapidly set up a Test and Trace Support payment scheme. This scheme was announced by Government on 20 September 2020 and Councils were required to have the prescribed scheme and a discretionary scheme in place to go live on 12 October. The schemes provide a one off payment of £500 to people on low incomes who are required to self-isolate by NHS test and trace, are unable to work and will lose income as a result. To qualify people have to be in receipt of certain welfare benefits for the prescribed scheme and on a low income for the discretionary. Cheltenham's scheme went live for applications via an online form on the website on 12 October.

Arts Council Culture Recovery Fund:

In October, three of Cheltenham's cultural organisations (The Festivals, The Everyman and The Cheltenham Trust) received between them £2.4m in funding from the Arts Council Culture Recovery Fund, as part of a £4m funding commitment for Gloucestershire.

Economic Recovery Task Force:

In September, a new Economic Recovery Task Force was formed to spearhead Cheltenham's economic response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Hosted by CBC, the new Task Force brings together senior leaders from across the public, private, charity and voluntary sectors to help drive forward the town's economic recovery. The Task Force is chaired by GFirst LEP Chair and senior industry figure Diane Savory OBE. Alongside her regional leadership role, Diane's recent appointment to the national High Streets Task Force and ministerial-chaired Economic Recovery Workgroup (MHCLG) ensures that the Cheltenham Task Force is feeding into and helping to inform what is a priority regional, national and international agenda.

Re-opening the high street fund:

MHCLG project officer now in place and so work underway to finalise the action plan and get into ERDF contract via Grant Funding Agreement. Positive feedback from activities to date, including business advice, flexibilities of licensing on pavement for chairs and tables and creation of more space to enable businesses to expand onto the highway. Currently investigating partial closure of Regents Street as further COVID measure as a trial to support social distancing and support for local businesses. Early engagement with GCC has been undertaken to understand parameters/constraints for these initiatives. Early engagement with business has taken place via BID. We will be utilising social engagement platform that has been provided by Common Place free of charge to consult on social distancing highways interventions.

Inward investment campaign 'We're moving to Cheltenham?'

The creation of the Economic Recovery Task Force coincided with the launch of the Council's inward investment campaign 'We're moving to Cheltenham?' The purpose of the campaign is to encourage business growth within the town and new inward investment. Developed by CBC and its destination and place marketing arm Marketing Cheltenham alongside Cheltenham BID and local brand agency ASHA, the new 'We're Moving to Cheltenham' initiative seeks to highlight the scale of investment and business growth that is underway across Cheltenham, the positive effect this is already having in attracting new business into the town and the range of opportunities that make it attractive for others to do the same. You can see the new 'We're Moving to Cheltenham' website at www.movingtocheltenham.com

Licensing:

CBC is producing a series of bulletins for licensed premises in response to COVID-19 issues and queries, including off-sales and minor variations. These business bulletins can be found

on the website at <https://us10.campaign-archive.com/home/?u=f97b01f6115db1bac686e8193&id=71448eeeb9> with 88 Cheltenham businesses that subscribe to the regular newsletter. We have also provided business advice through the BID's webinars to help BID businesses with compliance issues and answering questions about restriction regulations.

Finally, we have been proactively engaging with Cheltenham Night-safe to support businesses operating in the evening and night-time economy also through dedicated advice and support on a range of Covid related issues such as business closures, understanding the practical implications of the regulations and regular updates as regulations change. More information can be found at - https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/info/11/licensing_and_permits/1608/covid-19_recovery_for_licensed_premises

'Getting Building Fund':

In August, the £5.2 million flagship Minster Innovation Exchange scheme will move forward even quicker than planned and deliver an enhanced scheme thanks to funding of £3.114 million via GFirst LEP, from central Government's £900 million nationwide 'Getting Building Fund'. This will support jobs, regeneration and the high street.

Golden Valley Development:

In July, Cheltenham's £400m Golden Valley Development has taken a significant step closer with the announcement that six potential development partners have been shortlisted after an extensive search closed earlier that month. For more information on the Golden Valley Development visit www.goldenvalleyuk.com

National Business Grants scheme:

CBC was quick off the mark in getting 'cash out of the door' through the National Business Grants scheme. The scheme closed at the end of September with 1,836 grants, totalling £23.1m being paid. The rapid approach resulted in CBC being awarded a Community & Business Award from Punchline magazine. <https://www.punchline-gloucester.com/articles/aanews/cheltenham-borough-council-applauded-for-fast-tracking-changes>

Discretionary Business Grant scheme:

Following on from the National Business Grants Scheme, CBC worked with Stroud District Council, Tewkesbury Borough Council, and Gloucester City Council to establish a Discretionary Business Grant scheme. This scheme closed in June once the funding had been allocated and CBC paid 191 grants totalling £1,150,000. The scheme was developed with input from GFirstLEP, Cheltenham BID and Gloucester BID. A scheme such as this would normally take several months to complete, but this was developed in three weeks. Our share of the funding to distribute was £1.12m. Due to the effort and thinking put into the scheme, the partnership was able to add a fifth category in addition to the four set out by BEIS so more businesses could qualify for support.

Cultural strategy:

The council is leading a piece of work with cultural partners and Creative Tourist consultants to create a new cultural strategy for Cheltenham. This will provide a framework for the recovery of the cultural sector with a draft vision of "*Cheltenham being an internationally recognised as a truly innovative creative place and destination*"

Planning Control:

CBC extended its 'standard' construction hours across the town before Government announced a similar initiative, realising that this would benefit our residents and our construction sector. We have taken a proactive and positive approach to planning control enforcement, to enable businesses and organisations in the town to erect temporary structures to support their operations and allow for social distancing, without the need for

planning permission, good examples of businesses that have capitalised on this is 131 and Cheltenham Trust. The work of the Council's planning team has been recognised by:

- 'Have I got planning news for you' as champion of the week.
- Local business community <https://www.punchline-gloucester.com/articles/aanews/cheltenham-borough-council-applauded-for-fast-tracking-changes>
- The Chief Executive of the Royal Town Planning Institute referenced CBC on a BBC Radio 4 interview

This approach has attracted significant sector interest and as a result we made time to be interviewed by the LGA and Kings Chambers who is part of an industry group providing advice to government on licencing and planning changes required to business in the short term.

Workstream - Returning CBC to a new normal:

Before Covid-19, CBC had already embarked on a modernisation programme with new telephony, laptop rollout to replace traditional desktops, WebEx, Jabba, Webcasting and Blackberry Work. This enabled remote working to be rapidly rolled out. All Council meetings can be hosted and undertaken virtually and have been for several months. As part of the wider modernisation improvements the Cllr laptop rollout has almost completed.

Staff survey:

The remote staff survey working results are summarised below:

- 92% of staff felt they have the technology to stay connected and do all aspects of my current role (BAU or redeployment role) effectively
- 87% of staff were having either, daily, twice a week or weekly contact with their line manager
- 94% of staff felt in in general, that they are supported and have enough contact with their team& line manager and can raise any issues or concerns have with them
- 77% of staff felt they would like to work from home on a more regular basis in the future, when circumstances are more normal

Municipal Offices:

Some of the Municipal Office space has been reconfigured (desks and chairs) to ensure it is Covid-19 safe. Home working is still the default option but we now allow more Officers to work from the Municipal Offices up to a maximum of 40. Those customers that need to see an Officer face to face can do on an appointment basis.

Health & Safety:

Ensuring the safety of our staff is a top priority and there is a dedicated health & safety working group established to support managers and service teams with advice and guidance with any risk assessments. This working group is sponsored by a member of the Executive Leadership Team.

Workstream - Community & Volunteers:

CBC used its annual community grant scheme funding complimented with additional funding from Gloucestershire County Council to provide grant funding to those charities and community groups that were providing essential support for the most vulnerable. This provided a total fund of £100,000, with 52 grants being allocated. Five examples include:

- **The Long Table Cheltenham:** £2000
✓ **Outcome:** Delivering healthy, wholesome frozen meals to people's doors, charities and NHS workers.
- **The Indian Association:** £500
✓ **Outcome:** For PPE and cleaning materials to allow their community centre and place of worship to reopen with social distancing measures in place.
- **Battledown Friends Group:** £798
✓ **Outcome:** To increase ICT resources in the special school to allow children to see their therapists during Covid-19
- **Gloucestershire Counselling:** £2000
✓ **Outcome:** To provide laptops and licences to enable their counselling services to operate remotely.
- **Gloucestershire Deaf Association:** £1302
✓ **Outcome:** To provide a Covid-19 specific information support pack to those living with deafness in the area

Holiday Hunger Programme:

In July, Local food charities in Cheltenham secured £4,818 from Gloucestershire County Council, to provide meals for children on free school meals over the summer holidays, as part of its Holiday Hunger Programme. The charities, led by Family Space working under the #feedcheltenham banner, have been supporting each other through the crisis with some additional help from CBC and GCHQ. The strengths of the relationships developed through the crisis led to the collaborative bid that will see frozen meals being distributed through seven local centres across Cheltenham.

Food distribution innovation project:

Working with GCHQ, we continue to work with the nine community food providers in the town, plus the 5 parish councils. The focus for the summer was the holiday hunger scheme. Plans are now to explore the roll –out of food pantries based on a membership model, plus a digital platform.

No Child Behind Community Agreement:

In September The No Child Left Behind community agreement launched across the town, which has so far seen over 45 schools and organisations across all sectors commit to working with families in a way that focusses on kindness, understanding and empathy. Across the borough, 18 schools and 27 organisations have signed up to the aims of the NCLB community agreement. The initiative has also launched a [new website](#), designed to highlight the strengths and achievements of Cheltenham families and organisations, and to provide signposting and support.

Youth Hubs:

The Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) are looking to set up Youth Hubs in each district and CBC are in contact with DWP partnership managers about how we can support this initiative.

Workstream - Environment & Wellbeing

'Don't be a tosser' anti littering campaign:

Following the easing of lockdown restrictions earlier in the year, there was a spike in the amount of littering in the borough's parks and gardens. CBC responded rapidly by diverting UBICO resources from other tasks to tackle the problem and CBC also launched the popular 'don't be a tosser' anti littering campaign, where posters were rolled out more widely in Cheltenham following resident demand -

<https://www.gloucestershirelive.co.uk/news/cheltenham-news/council-tough-dont-tosser-posters-4286335>

Supporting the Local Outbreak Management Plan (LOMP):

The Director of Public Health (GCC) has requested local authority support with local 'outbreak management' arrangements, for which the county has received a total of £2.2 million funding; CBC has worked up a proposal for the local authority element which would involve establishing a virtual team, capable of responding 24/7 to any new county outbreaks.

Workstream - Finance:

The impact of Covid-19 has affected the finances of all local authorities. There is a Covid-19 revised budget being taken to full Council in November, which is currently being developed by the Council's Cabinet Member for Finance and Executive Director for Finance & Assets.

Local Government Association (LGA):

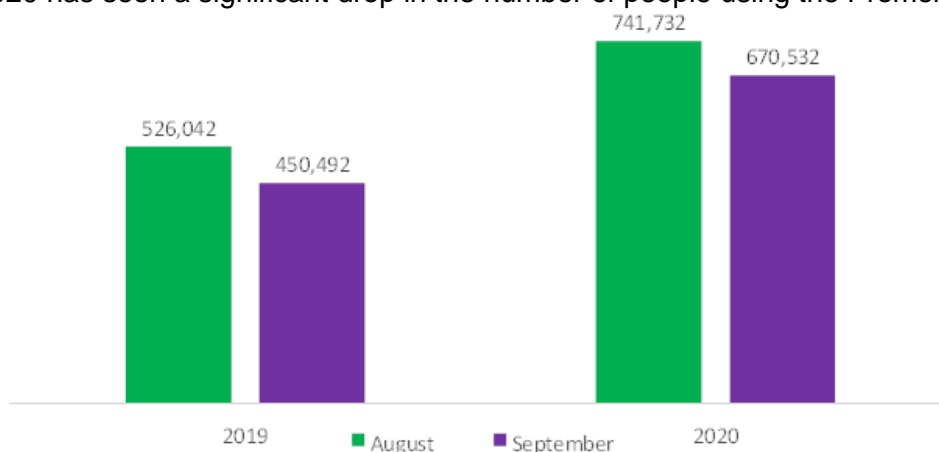
CBC has been approached by the LGA about a mini recovery peer review between the 10th and 12th November. This offer has been accepted and a LGA mini peer review will be led by the CEO and Deputy Leader of Exeter City Council. This will include a range of external stakeholders.

Recovery Performance Measures:

A range of performance measures will be used to measure recovery and a selection of these are briefly highlighted below:

- Unemployment rate
- Job postings
- Benefit claimants trend
- Vacancy rate
- Footfall
- Infection rate
- Carbon emissions
- CBC MTFS

Footfall: 41% increase in visitor numbers in August when compared to last year. September saw an even higher increase of 49%. The majority of the footfall is on High Street, with a very different picture for the Promenade. Footfall on the Promenade fell as soon as lockdown came into force in March. July saw a 40% increase on June's visitor numbers and those numbers more than doubled again in August. However, when compared with 2019, 2020 has seen a significant drop in the number of people using the Promenade.



During September there was a steep decline in the number of people coming to town during the evenings on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Saturday evenings continued to be the peak visitor time of the week, even during the Eat Out to Help Out scheme.

Visit Cheltenham: There was an increase in the number visits to the Visit Cheltenham website during this time. The number of unique visits was up by 53.5% with 'things to do' being the most popular pages viewed, closely followed by shopping and food and drink.

Vacant units: Based on latest BID survey we have a 10.5% vacancy rate, which is actually lower than it was at its peak in July when it was 12.5%. (Note this only covers vacancies with BID zone). According to the last quarterly report produced by Springboard, the national average is 10.8% and the South West average 12%. These are street access units only so will differ from our actual vacancy figures.

Risks:

There are a number of risks to the recovery efforts with several briefly summarised below:

- Increasing infection rate: if the trend continues increase it could lead to further lockdown restrictions as shown in other parts of the UK
- End of Furlough at the end of October: this may see the unemployment rate increase further and putting more pressure on the economy
- Pressure on CBC resources: if more resources are needed to support the emergency response work this will increase pressure on resources available for maintaining council services and leading recovery efforts
- Financial impact; local government has been affected and the financial outlook remains challenging
- If our community partners are not sufficiently resilient throughout autumn and winter, this could mean that vulnerable people struggle to get support from much valued organisations.

Summary:

Whilst a lot of recovery work has been commenced in a short-period of time, there is a long way to go and the challenge ahead is not under estimated. This briefing paper does not cover all recovery activity underway by summarises a range of key initiatives. More information can be provided to the committee on request.

Background Papers	None
Contact Officer	Darren Knight, Executive Director People & Change 01242 264137 & Darren.knight@cheltenham.gov.uk
Accountability	Cllr Steve Jordan, Leader of the Council