

SUBJECT: CORONAVIRUS STRATEGIC AIMS: EVALUATION OF PROGRESS

MEETING: Cabinet

DATE: 4 November 2020

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To provide an overview of progress against the strategic aims set by Cabinet to guide activity through the Coronavirus pandemic.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Cabinet evaluate progress against the purpose and strategic aims that have been in place during the pandemic and use this to inform future activity.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 The Coronavirus pandemic has posed an unprecedented challenge to our way of life and the way in which we provide services. The need to preserve life and stop the spread of the virus, while continuing to support communities, has meant that we have needed to work in new ways.
- 3.2 The Council has risen to the challenge by establishing new ways of delivering services that support residents and businesses, assisting community activity and supporting staff well-being. The pace of change over the past seven months has been unrelenting, with hundreds of staff re-deployed, new services created almost overnight, and millions of pounds re-directed towards preserving life and helping local businesses remain viable.
- 3.3 Monmouthshire County Council has a long-standing purpose of building sustainable and resilient communities. At the outset of the pandemic, Cabinet introduced a revised purpose of protecting life and supporting our communities, underpinned by eight new strategic aims, to provide clarity and ensure accountability.
- 3.4 As the incidents of infection started to decline during the summer months, the focus shifted to creating the conditions for residents and businesses to take those first steps, while recognising that coronavirus remains an active threat to life and one that will cast a long shadow for many in our communities. For this phase, Cabinet developed a new purpose in July 2020, with a focus on making everyone feel safe in their communities, to continue to support each other and to reach out to those who need help, and agreed an update of the strategic aims in the Coronavirus 'Transition' strategy.
- 3.5 This paper presents an opportunity to evaluate progress against those aims. Alongside our own services, we have continued to support local volunteers and community activity. The efforts of thousands within our communities to pull together and help others has shone through paying testament to the resilience of Monmouthshire's communities and businesses. The purpose, strategic aims and associated actions have been monitored by Cabinet throughout the pandemic. Appendix 1 outlines some of the activity that has been delivered over the last few months. These include:
- Provision of support and payment of more than £24 million of funding to almost 1,900 local businesses to help them survive the impact of the pandemic and protect jobs;
 - All schools in Monmouthshire reopened in September in line with Welsh Government guidance;

- Continued to safely collect waste and recycling from all households;
- Contributed beyond our borders to regional emergency response structures and the staffing of a regional Test Trace Protect contact tracing service;
- Continued to manage, adapt and provide services to vulnerable citizens.

3.6 The number of cases in Monmouthshire remained below the important threshold of 50 cases per 100,000 population and 5% infection rate, and as a result, the county was not subject to the local lockdowns seen in other areas of Wales. Cases have now started to rise across the whole of the UK and on 23rd October, Wales entered a 'firebreak' lockdown for a period of 17 days to help regain control of coronavirus and reduce the R rate.

3.7 Our organisation will transition smoothly into these new arrangements because we have planned for it and rehearsed it. Vital services continue to operate, including:

- Help for vulnerable young people and adults who need our support;
- Advice, assistance and administration of funding for local businesses
- Support for community activity and volunteering to help people with essential tasks. such as collecting prescriptions and getting shopping;
- All our schools will remain open while having consistent, high quality distance learning in place for those pupils who can't attend school;
- Extending the opening hours of our customer services.

3.8 During this period, a number of our services are required to close; these include recycling centres, leisure centres, libraries, museums, community hubs / centres, indoor visitor attractions and youth centres. Services will continue to adapt to provide a level of service through digital means.

3.9 The firebreak will not make the virus disappear. It buys us time to reset for the next phase when a new set of national rules will be introduced, covering how people can meet and how the public sector and businesses operate. When we understand what that looks like, Cabinet will again consider whether its strategy and response needs to be reset.

3.10 We have the structures and mechanisms in place to track progress and ensure we remain focussed on our purpose. The Council's established performance framework continues to facilitate service planning, performance management and risk management to ensure that we are focused on what needs to happen and can demonstrate progress in a robust and transparent way.

4 EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

4.1 The strategic aims have been informed by the latest available evidence and government guidance. An Equality & Future Generations Evaluation was completed and reported to cabinet when the aims were set. The strategic aims will continue to take account of equality and the components of well-being. The legislation and the council's responsibilities in all these areas will remain an important part in our response as it continues to develop.

5 OPTIONS APPRAISAL

The strategic aims are informed by the latest available evidence and government guidance, to inform the Council's ongoing response to the Coronavirus pandemic. While a number of arrangements have continued to be developed and implemented to support these aims, the Council continues to operate in a dynamic environment and delivery of each aim is not without challenges and risks. The delivery will continue to be monitored and programmes will need to be flexible in timescale and content as circumstances and guidance changes.

6 EVALUATION CRITERIA

6.1 Where available, measures or milestones have been developed to track progress on the actions that underpin the strategic aims. Nonetheless, it needs to be recognised that in a changing

external environment, it is likely that actions, and therefore the corresponding measures of progress, will need to be continuously reviewed.

7 REASONS:

- 7.1 To provide clarity and ensure accountability through the council's response to the pandemic, support the evaluation of progress and use of information to inform the future shape of service delivery as the Council continues to evolve and adapt to changing circumstances.

8 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 8.1 Delivery of the strategic aims will continue to have significant resource implications, including increased costs to maintain current service delivery and demands in setting up new or amended services. A number of the Council's income streams have also ceased and savings planned as part of the 2020/21 budget have been delayed.
- 8.2 Prior to the pandemic, the Council was facing significant financial challenges heading into the 2020/21 financial year; the pandemic has accentuated the challenge. The pandemic presents its own financial challenges and uncertainty both in terms of additional cost and significant loss of income across services. Our latest forecasts show through COVID-19, we have lost £4.83m in income and incurred additional costs of £1.36m in our response effort.
- 8.3 The key risk and uncertainty continues to be the amount of compensatory Welsh Government funding that the Council will receive. The other determining factor of course being the length of time that these impacts are felt. Following the announcement of significant further funding for local authorities in August, the Council continues to work with Welsh Government on reimbursing COVID-19 related costs and income losses.
- 8.4 A specific strategic aim has been identified to ensure the Council remains financially sustainable as an organisation. The financial challenges facing the Council and resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic are significant in the current year and over the next 4 years of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). The consequences for the MTFP and the budget process for 2021/22 will be developed in parallel in the coming months to feed into the normal budget cycle and process.

9 CONSULTEES:

Strategic Leadership Team
Cabinet

10 BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Monmouthshire Coronavirus Response Strategic Aims
Monmouthshire Corporate Plan 2017/22

11 AUTHORS:

Matthew Gatehouse, Head of Policy and Governance

12 CONTACT DETAILS:

Tel: (01633) 644397
e-mail: matthewgatehouse@monmouthshire.gov.uk

Aim: Provide clear, purposeful civic leadership	
What we said we would do	What we have done
<p>Digitising services where possible to make them readily available to citizens</p> <p>Preparing for the re-opening of all leisure/cultural services as soon as guidelines allow</p>	<p>Used digital technology to safely open up access to services. This includes booking appointments at household waste recycling sites which had over 15,000 bookings in three months. More than 3000 library books have been ordered through request and collect using the My Monmouthshire App while free e-book downloads increased by 90%. As well as live streaming of all council meetings.</p> <p>Leisure centres, community hubs and museums were reopened for a number of weeks, although the firebreak lockdown will see closures for a two week period. Our libraries are operating on a request and collect service.</p> <p>Since lockdown, we have dealt with more than 50,000 customer service enquiries digitally or on the telephone.</p>
Aim: Maximise the time children can safely spend in school and have consistent, high quality distance learning in place when they can't be in school	
What we said we would do	What we have done
<p>Maximising the time that learners can safely spend in school from September onwards;</p> <p>Ensuring that consistent, high quality distance learning is in place to support children when they are not in school</p>	<p>All 30 primary and 4 Secondary schools in Monmouthshire re-opened in September in line with Welsh Government guidance. The firebreak lockdown will see years 9 – 13 taught via distance learning for a week after the October half term.</p> <p>Schools have been assessing pupils on return in September to identify the support and intervention needed for pupils to continue to make accelerated progress and close gaps in learning.</p> <p>All schools have been progressing the delivery of a distance learning offer to their learners. To assist this, we have established digital learning technologies and approaches, which are being further developed into a blended learning approach going forward.</p> <p>MonLife have provided 'Summer Hub' provision for children with a total of 4,170 attendances, an average of 166 children attended the Summer Hubs per day.</p>
Aim: Help vulnerable young people and adults who need our support	
What we said we would do	What we have done
<p>Continuing to provide vital social care services, including child protection, care at home and residential care, 7 days a week;</p> <p>Preparing those services that support vulnerable / high risk groups for an increase in demand as 'lockdown' eases;</p>	<p>We have continued to provide vital Adult and Children's social care. We have received an average of 102 contacts per week relating to supporting children and young people in Children's social services, and an average of 13 additional requests per week to provide domiciliary care in Adults social services in the last few months.</p> <p>We have continued to manage, adapt and provide services to vulnerable citizens. Some services are seeing an increase in demand that is putting pressure on services, particularly in adult's social care which continues to be managed.</p> <p>We are supporting 103 households in temporary accommodation. New guidance seeks to extend our homelessness offer to provide suitable long term housing for all those accommodated in temporary housing. Plans are being explored to meet this requirement.</p>

Aim: Assist local businesses to reopen and ensure our towns are safe places for traders and visitors

What we said we would do	What we have done
<p>Remodelling our town centres and encourage people to shop safely and shop locally;</p> <p>Supporting our hospitality and tourism sectors to re-open as soon as possible</p> <p>Preparing to provide services which support individuals and families that lose their job / income</p>	<p>We made changes to support the safe re-opening of town and village centres, widening pavements and changing traffic flows to improve safety and enable socially distanced shopping and dining. Feedback on these arrangements continues to be reviewed. We also promoted the Shop Local, Shop Monmouthshire campaign.</p> <p>We provided financial support and advice to over 2000 businesses during the pandemic with almost 1900 receiving grants of more than £24 million. Other grants administered include Childcare Care, Start Up and Freelancer.</p> <p>Promoted 'Visit Monmouthshire. Safely.' to make it as easy and safe as possible for visitors in Monmouthshire.</p> <p>The firebreak lockdown will see closures of many non-essential businesses for two weeks. The council will continue to provide advice and support to businesses during this time.</p> <p>As many residents saw their employment and financial situations change, services have provided a range of support, for example promoting access to benefits, spreading council tax payments over longer periods, and providing employment and skills support. As part of the Council's continued commitment to Social Justice, evidence is being reviewed and activity related to poverty in Monmouthshire being planned.</p>

Aim: Keep our neighbourhoods clean and tidy whilst managing waste as sustainably as we can

What we said we would do	What we have done
<p>Providing a full waste management service and continue to develop our approaches to enhance the biodiversity and ecology of our open spaces;</p>	<p>Waste and recycling services have continued to take place as normal. It's difficult to predict performance in 2020/21 but the first quarter saw the highest recycling rate ever in the county of 74%, with record numbers of residents using kerbside recycling collections following the closure with Household Waste Recycling Centres.</p> <p>Three household waste and recycling centres; Llanfoist, Five Lanes and Mitchell Troy have re-opened. A booking system has been developed to keep numbers to a manageable level to maintain social distancing. Recycling centres will close for two weeks as per the requirements of the firebreak lockdown.</p> <p>We launched the 'Don't Mess with Monmouthshire' campaign to raise awareness of littering.</p> <p>We are considering the learning from the changes to our grounds maintenance services to inform how we can enhance the biodiversity and ecology of our open spaces.</p>

Aim: Be a trusted partner for other agencies / organisations

What we said we would do	What we have done
<p>Delivering with partner agencies an effective Test Trace and Protect system so we can identify virus outbreaks quickly and contain them;</p>	<p>Alongside our Gwent partners, we are contributing to the delivery of the COVID-19 Test, Trace and Protect system. The service is tracing and contacting residents who have been in contact with the virus to provide advice and request they self-isolate to minimise the spread of the virus. Recently the service has contacted 92% of COVID-19 positive cases within 24 hours</p>

<p>Supporting our community volunteering network to provide long-term benefit to our communities</p>	<p>We are actively working with and providing support to our partners and neighbours following an increase in COVID-19 cases throughout the Gwent area.</p> <p>The Council's partnership team received 236 offers to volunteer and 581 request for support from members of the public. We are developing, with our public sector partners, a model of neighbourhood networks that work with community volunteers to support long-term benefit.</p> <p>Through the firebreak period we are supporting a range of community activity working with those in our communities supporting residents where they need it with essential tasks such as collecting prescriptions and getting shopping.</p>
<p>Aim: Keep a safe, healthy and productive workforce</p>	
<p>What we said we would do</p>	<p>What we have done</p>
<p>Ensuring our staff working in all services are safe</p>	<p>Staff have embraced new ways of working to keep themselves, colleagues and residents safe while delivering the many services our communities rely on.</p> <p>We ensured staff have a range of support on wellbeing, can access the right Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and have access to testing if they display symptoms.</p> <p>We have distributed approximately 1,138,000 items of PPE for the provision of social care in the county.</p> <p>Communication and engagement with staff has continued. The SupportAll portal has been developed, which allows staff to access information on a range of subjects, such as testing, protecting homeworkers and bereavement. The weekly staff Digital 'cwtch' continues and averages more than a hundred viewers each week.</p>
<p>Aim: Ensure we remain financially sustainable as an organisation</p>	
<p>What we said we would do</p>	<p>What we have done</p>
<p>Beginning our financial recovery programme</p>	<p>Council was already facing financial challenges pre-COVID-19; the pandemic has accentuated the challenge. Through COVID-19, we have lost £4.83m in income and incurred additional costs of £1.36m in our response effort (a total of £6.19m), alongside non-COVID-19 pressures in 2020/21 of £1.23m.</p> <p>Following the announcement of significant further funding for local authorities in August, the Council continues to work with Welsh Government on reimbursing COVID-19 related costs and income losses, which it is hoped will cover most of the losses as result of COVID-19.</p> <p>The ongoing pandemic and continued uncertainty presents a continuing financial challenge in the current year and over the next 4 years of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). The consequences for our finances will continued to be developed to inform the budget setting process for 2021/22 and the medium-term financial plan.</p>