

# **NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **Cabinet**

**30 July 2020**

### **Report of Corporate Directors' Group**

#### **Matter for Decision**

**Wards Affected:** All Wards

#### **Covid-19: Moving Forward Stabilisation – The Period Between Response and Recovery**

#### **Purpose of Report**

1. To present to Cabinet the draft Recovery Strategy for approval.

#### **Executive Summary**

2. It will be considerable time – eighteen months or more – before the Council can start to plan to recover from the crisis. The intervening period will therefore be a period of stabilisation.
3. The draft Recovery Strategy sets out a general framework that will support a consistent and co-ordinated approach as we move towards recovery across the Council.
4. The draft Strategy has been presented to all Scrutiny Committees for comment before consideration at Cabinet.

## Background

### Looking Back

5. In the middle of March 2020, the Council mobilised an emergency response to the developing COVID-19 national emergency situation.
6. Since then, there has been an immense effort to ensure the Council was able to take action, in step with policy decisions taken by the Welsh Government and the UK Government.
7. A number of key actions were undertaken during that period, including:
  - a. The establishment of a 7 day/week enhanced communications service;
  - b. The closing down of Council services to assist in reducing the spread of the disease as well as focusing regulatory services on ensuring compliance with new legislation and guidance by local businesses and other organisations;
  - c. The changing of services so that critical service could operate safely over the period; and
  - d. The establishment of new service responses.
8. To enable these changes, support functions across the Council also adapted, for example:
  - a. The refocusing of the Council's Human Resources Service to support the workforce as many were required to work from home;
  - b. Risk assessments undertaken to identify the range of protective measures required to protect staff and service users; and
  - c. The work done in recent years to develop the Council's digital capability has been a key asset during the outbreak. The

number of staff using remote technology increased from an average of 50 per day to over 1500 per day over the first four weeks of the outbreak.

9. In addition to the many service and support service changes that were implemented to ensure the Council was able to mobilise its emergency response quickly, the leadership and democratic oversight of the Council's work also needed to adapt:
  - a. The Leader of the Council participated in the network of meetings established by the Welsh Local Government Association designed to co-ordinate the local government response across Wales;
  - b. Due to the lockdown measures imposed by the UK and Welsh governments suspending all Council meetings, decisions have been undertaken under the urgency and emergency provisions contained within the Council's Constitution;
  - c. To ensure visibility of decision making, administrative processes were adapted to work on a digital platform; and
  - d. Following the enactment of legislation to remove the requirement for Members to be seen and heard in formal meetings of the Council, the Council quickly moved to resume key meetings using Microsoft Teams.
  
10. The professional leadership and governance arrangements also needed to adapt to ensure the Council was able to mobilise its emergency response quickly:
  - a. The Chief Executive established and chaired an Incident Management Group (IMT) to provide professional leadership. The group met daily, seven days/week.
  - b. Issues from the (IMT) were briefed to daily meetings between the Leader and Deputy Leader and the Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Executive. Information was also cascaded down

to operational teams through the respective chief officers but also where needed into wider structures.

11. The local emergency response was also undertaken in alignment with the work of the South Wales Local Resilience Forum which convened a series of Strategic Co-ordinating Group meetings – with a focus on facilitating co-ordination across the different arms of the public service, e.g. police, local government and others.
12. On 15<sup>th</sup> May 2020, the Welsh Government published initial plans to lift restrictions in Wales – “Unlocking society and our economy: continuing the conversation”. The route map contained in the plans signalled a cautious shift towards lifting some of the restrictions.
13. As in the initial response, the Council will act in step with the Welsh Government. The draft Recovery Strategy sets out a general framework that will support a consistent and co-ordinated approach as we move towards recovery across the Council.

## **Looking Forward**

14. As in the response phase, it is crucial we take a corporate approach to the way we achieve stabilisation.
15. The draft Strategy sets out three key areas of focus:
  - i. Test, Trace, Protect
  - ii. Resumption of Council services and functions
  - iii. Understanding and responding to the impact COVID-19 has had for citizens, businesses and other organisations across Neath Port Talbot
16. The work undertaken in each of the above key areas will be tested against the vision, principles and objectives set out in the draft Strategy.

17. As we move towards recovery, political leadership will be provided by the Cabinet, supported by a cross party Member Panel – Coronavirus Recovery Phase. Through the work of the Panel, mechanisms will be established to ensure all Members of Council have an opportunity to shape the Council's plans to resume services and functions.
18. Professional leadership will be provided by the chief officer group, led by the Chief Executive through a Recovery Planning Group. The Recovery Planning Group will ensure there continues to be a corporate approach to the way we approach stabilisation through to recovery, using the lessons learned from the immediate response phase.
19. Each service manager will prepare plans for the recovery of the services and functions for which they are accountable, using the Strategy as a framework.
20. There are a number of key risks and issues identified in the draft Strategy that will need to be managed as the Strategy is implemented.

## **Consultation**

21. There is no requirement in the Constitution for consultation on this item.

## **Financial Appraisal**

22. The medium to long term financial implications for the Council are largely unknown. In the short term, the Council's cash flow can be sustained as a consequence of advance payments of Revenue Support Grant. The Director of Finance and Corporate Services is preparing estimates of the one-off and recurring financial impacts which will be reported to Members in due course.

## **Integrated Impact Assessment**

23. It is acknowledged the crisis has created greater inequality and has differentially impacted across the communities we service. As we do the work to bring services back into operation it will be important that we make sure we consider the equalities impact of our proposals fully to reduce these inequalities wherever we can, safely.

## **Workforce Impact**

24. The current Welsh Government guidance on working from home remains unchanged, i.e. that 'all reasonable steps should be taken by employers to help people work from home'. To ensure a consistent approach to managing homeworking, a "Homeworking Guidance – during COVID-19" has been developed. This guidance provides a framework for both managers and employees during the current context and where the government continues to advise that employees must work from home where they are able to do so.

## **Legal Impact**

25. The legal powers for all service changes that were necessary and those that continue to remain in force are derived from the emergency legislation enacted by the UK and Welsh Governments and the associated guidance and regulations.

## **Risk Management**

26. The risks associated with the implementation of the draft Strategy have been identified and will be managed as the Strategy is implemented.

## **Recommendations**

27. It is recommended that Members approve the draft Covid-19: Moving Forward Stabilisation – The Period between Response and Recovery Strategy.

## **Reason for Proposed Decision**

28. To enable the Council to undertake a consistent and co-ordinated approach as we move towards recovery.

## **Appendices**

29. Appendix 1 – Draft Covid-19: Moving Forward Stabilisation – The Period between Response and Recovery Strategy.

## **List of Background Papers**

30. None

## **Officer Contact**

Steve Phillips, Chief Executive Tel: 01639 763306 or e-mail: [s.phillips@npt.gov.uk](mailto:s.phillips@npt.gov.uk)

Karen Jones, Assistant Chief Executive & Chief Digital Officer Tel: 01639 763284 or e-mail: [k.jones3@npt.gov.uk](mailto:k.jones3@npt.gov.uk)

Hywel Jenkins, Director of Finance and Corporate Services Tel: 01639 763251 or e-mail: [h.jenkins@npt.gov.uk](mailto:h.jenkins@npt.gov.uk)

Aled Evans, Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Tel: 01639 763393 or e-mail: [a.evans@npt.gov.uk](mailto:a.evans@npt.gov.uk)

Nicola Pearce, Director of Environment and Regeneration Tel: 01639 686668 or e-mail: [n.pearce@npt.gov.uk](mailto:n.pearce@npt.gov.uk)

Andrew Jarret, Director of Social Services, Health and Housing Tel: 01639 763279 or e-mail: [a.jarrett@npt.gov.uk](mailto:a.jarrett@npt.gov.uk)