Covid 19 Pandemic

LEAD MEMBER: Elected Mayor Mike Starkie
LEAD OFFICER: Pat Graham, Chief Executive
REPORT AUTHOR: Steve Smith

Why has this report come to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee?
This report has been requested by Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide an update to the Committee on the current position regarding the impact of Covid 19 on communities in Copeland and plans for recovery.

SUMMARY:
This paper will provide Members of the Committee with a summary of key issues and activities that have been undertaken in response to the pandemic and its impact on businesses and communities across the Borough and the work underway to shape a recovery plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS:
Members are asked to note the current position regarding the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic in Copeland and comment upon plans for the development of a recovery plan.

1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The post-Covid world is full of uncertainty currently for Copeland and the rest of the UK. The Council has been, and will continue to be, fundamentally at the core of supporting our communities through this process. As Members will be aware the Council has been a key provider of essential services through the response stage. Appendix A shows the magnitude of the Council’s collective role in the response phase between the start of the pandemic and mid-May, and of course this has continued in subsequent weeks and months.

As the country and localities turn their attentions to recovery we still need to be mindful of potential local outbreaks or ‘spikes’ in infection rates which may warrant specific ‘response’ management arrangements including the potential for local lock-down measures as has been seen in such places as Leicester and Blackburn. The pandemic is having an international, national and regional impact and at the local level there is a need to monitor the changing situation that exists and be able to adapt to new situations as they develop. Members may also want to view two documents published by Government relating to recovery. The first is ‘Our Plan to Rebuild’ published in May (see https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy) and the second published in July and is
Equally fundamental is the role of the Council in leading the development of a new post-pandemic aspirational future for our residents and businesses. The understanding is that both the impact and the process of recovery will be long term, with all parts of our communities affected. The response to the crisis has provided a valuable insight into vulnerabilities within our communities which we need to tackle in any future approach—but it has also provided some shining examples of how we can work together to help each other through such a crisis. The lockdown and the reduction in traffic movements has also generated a renewed interest in local environmental issues, climate change and enjoyment of the countryside and wildlife, issues which need to be built into any recovery plan.

2. **KEY WORKSTREAMS**

Throughout the pandemic the Council has been integral to a number of work-streams;

- Coordination at a Cumbria Local Resilience Forum (LRF) level including both at response stage and more latterly engagement with the LRF Recovery Group

- Working with Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) specifically around economic recovery

- Specifically working with the LRF to support the establishment of the hospital back up facility and recovery centre in the Sports Centre.

- Working with local key stakeholders and supply chain partners to support local welfare coordination and the local recovery hub centre and a number of local community response activities such as the distribution of essential food needs through for example the ‘Bainbridge Bags’.

- Redeploying staff to support the LRF and wider community response to the pandemic

- Delivering support to local residents through the local recovery centre hub

- Managing the process of re-opening our town centres as the lockdown measures are lifted

- Collating information and data on impacts in the locality, working with the Cumbria Observatory to bring together relevant and reliable datasets.
• Distributing grants and rates relief to local businesses

• Redesigning our work and skills programme to support our residents into employment through digital delivery

• Temporary homeless accommodation

• Business Closure requirements – compliance checks and information and advice to those required to be closed

Some of the key issues highlighted include;

• Food resilience – food poverty issues going forward and remaining throughout recovery process

• Mental health issues – exacerbated or caused by current situation, health anxiety and stress, delayed access to health support, vulnerable families and individuals doubly affected by lack of access to support services

• Personal finances – loss of jobs, reduction of income, self-employed losing work – repercussions for CBC Council Tax income/benefits – implications for families living in poverty - Growth in number of people claiming Universal Credits - Number of employees furloughed especially within the nuclear sector and its supply chain and potential for further impact as furlough scheme closes.

• Analysis of use of social media and mass media - Has information got to people who don’t use social media or the internet?

• Homeless people – they have been found accommodation, but what will happen to them once the emergency situation is eased? Will the Council be expected to continue to provide resources beyond the usual pre-Covid 19 provision? There may be an increase in homelessness due to people finding themselves in unexpected financial difficulties

• Tourism/hospitality industry, plus retail and business impacts generally – target appropriate support to sectors during lock down and into recovery

• Potential increase in domestic abuse – there are fewer reports at present, but when lockdown is lifted, there may be people who can then leave abusive relationships but need help. A lot of this is hidden at present. It will also be exacerbated by current situation.

• Digital exclusion and internet usage – stats show that only 2% of premises in Copeland have poor internet provision, but 12% of people don’t or can’t use it. Access to information, benefits, knowledge sharing is mostly via internet.

• Supporting businesses to meet Covid secure requirements when closure restrictions lifted

• Responding to a rise in referrals relating to anti-social behavior, crime and disorder
• A newly created vulnerable group brought about by the effects of CV-19 i.e. those experiencing financial hardship and vulnerability from a cohort who up to now would not have experienced this at all, or, to such an extent and depth.

3. RECOVERY THEMES AND WORKSTREAMS

It is clear that the period of recovery will need to focus on vulnerabilities highlighted and in some cases exacerbated by the pandemic. These include tackling;

• Food Poverty – long term arrangements required and access will be maintained to food in emergencies.
• Mental health, loneliness and isolation,
• Physical activity
• Digital exclusion,
• Debt management and budgeting.
• Building community group and third sector capacity
• Uncertainty about future employment prospects post furlough
• Social prescribing – referring patients to the right support in the community
• Business support across sectors, particular focus to those hit hardest in tourism, retail, hospitality
• Town centre resilience, adapting to different markets and demands through developing leisure options
• Test and Trace support

In terms of resourcing the support mechanisms, there are a number of working groups that have been established through partner collaboration including;

• Copeland Recovery Group formed from the welfare response support (transitioning to be called Thriving Communities Forum).
• Social Prescribing Group – CBC, CCC, NHS
• Children’s Trust Board locality group – emerging.
• Copeland Health and Well-Being Forum (link with Cumbria Health and Wellbeing Board)
• Town Deal Boards in Cleator Moor and Millom – Towns Fund delivery focused on Covid recovery
• Cumbria LRF – Strategic Recovery Coordination Group and Health Protection Board and Multi Agency Information Cell (MAIC)

The Thriving Communities Forum ensures that we maintain links with the excellent community response provided by both established and newly formed groups. Information from the welfare response group has and will continue to inform the Reboot plan.
4. **REBOOT – DEVELOPING A RECOVERY PLAN FOR COPELAND**

As we move from the response phase into recovery we now need to move forward from a reactive to a proactive mode, to provide leadership to our community and use what has been learned during the pandemic to form a plan for the future. ReBoot is more than a plan for recovery, it is a plan to re-boot - the economy, our aspirations and the way we work together. It will paint a picture of that aspirational ‘new normal’ which is based on three key messages;

1. In the future no-one within the Copeland community will be ‘left behind’ – all residents will have equal access to the support services they require to meet their individual needs at a time and through a medium/channel that meets their preference.
2. Our collective priority will be to ensure that we can all go about our day to day activities in a safe and healthy environment, with respect, regard and consideration for everyone inside and visiting our communities.
3. We will all work together to ensure that we develop a more sustainable and local approach to protecting our environment, tackling climate change and supporting the local economy.

Many of the Council’s strategies and policies are affected by the impact of the pandemic and the subsequent needs of our communities. Some are now outdated or outmoded and require overhaul. Others require a substantial rewrite for the post-Covid world.

The way we use our built estate has changed alongside our business need. With the move to home and remote working throughout the pandemic, the way we occupy our operational buildings also needs to change. The safety of our staff is paramount and our offices have been adapted to be safe places to work from, conforming to Government guidelines, with a continued emphasis on agile and flexible working. The pandemic has presented opportunities to streamline our operations and our built estate is being used to support this new way of working.

The Council is currently delivering directly and supporting others to deliver a wide range of interventions and projects many of which have been designed and developed in a pre-Covid environment. Project funding opportunities such as the Future High Streets Fund, and Town Deals, Coastal Communities Fund and Borderlands will be cornerstones to invest in our Borough to support the post Covid Plan going forward.

We are working with Sellafield Ltd colleagues, and those from PPP too, to bring together the SL Social Impact programme with the proposals contained within the PPP programme (MESH) and those contained within the Council programme to create one overarching programme to ensure compatibility and added value, avoid duplication and make better use of project and programme management and project delivery and development resources, through exploring the potential the establishment of a ‘virtual
impact team'. With partners we are exploring how we can bring together the teams and individuals delivering these programmes into one virtual team and the management, monitoring, reporting and governance processes we would need to put into place to collaboratively deliver the expected outcomes.

Through analysis of Covid 19 impact data we will need to prioritise existing projects (including maybe stopping those that have served their purpose or who no longer have a purpose in the post-pandemic Copeland) and may need to develop new ones to fill obvious gaps as evidenced by the data. For example the Council has recently launched ‘Buy Local. Keep it in Copeland’, a digital trading platform to support recovery.

The implementation of Reboot may result in implications for our workforce. If this does then all people matters will be addressed in line with current legislation and full engagement with any employee that is affected. Reboot will require our employees to model the correct behaviours, like they all did when in the response phase of the pandemic - Performing to a high standard, being Productive, Professional and Passionate so that they can understand and deliver their roles, maintaining a focus on residents and customers and the corporate expectation.

5. STATUTORY OFFICER COMMENTS (IF APPLICABLE)

5.1 Monitoring Officer and Legal Comments:
No specific legal issues arise from this report. Any legal issues which have arisen from Covid-19 have been dealt with by specific decisions taken at the appropriate time either by Council, the Executive or the Chief Executive.

5.2 Section 151 Officer Comments:

5.3 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Comments:

6. OTHER CONSULTEE COMMENTS

Consultees:

Background Paper and Appendices:
How did we help?

1700 calls to vulnerable residents
233 food parcels delivered
166 medically vulnerable residents supported
234 cooked meals issued in three day period
25 community groups supported
16 staff members deployed to help
1 recovery centre co-ordinated

72 people offered homeless advice and assistance
19 disabled facilities grants issued
29 homeless people accommodated
8 victims of domestic abuse helped

£14.6 million in business grants awarded
£5.4 million in Expanded Retail Relief awarded
344 man hours spent supporting and advising businesses
800 households awarded Council Tax Hardship Reduction

98 building inspections carried out
60 planning applications received
45 planning applications determined

130 social media posts created
20 press releases issued

5558 customer calls answered
2087 customer emails answered

We collected:
800 tonnes of recycling
420 tonnes of garden waste
3000 tonnes of household waste

524 new benefit claims processed
3920 changes in circumstances processed
195 Discretionary Housing Payments made

Our team also dealt with:
189 pest control enquiries
187 land charges applications
43 licencing applications

Thank you to all our officers who made it possible to support our residents through these challenging times.