

ANGUS COUNCIL

10 SEPTEMBER 2020

COVID 19 – RESPONSE, RECOVERY AND RENEWAL

REPORT BY MARGO WILLIAMSON CHIEF EXECUTIVE

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this report is to provide members with an overview on Angus Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic including detailing its impact and outlining proposals in terms of recovery and renewal as well as providing a route map for Angus Council in line with 'Scotland's route map through and out of the crisis'.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Council:

- (i) Notes Angus Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic including its successes, challenges and opportunities to inform future service delivery and ways of working;
- (ii) Approves Angus Council's Route Map attached as Appendix one to this report, and;
- (iii) Notes the Recovery and Renewal proposals and initiatives.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE ANGUS COUNCIL PLAN AND COMMUNITY PLAN

This report contributes to the following strategic priorities in the Angus Council Plan of:

We want-

Angus to be a go-to area to do business

To maximise inclusion and reduce inequalities

Our communities to be strong, resilient and led by citizens

Angus Council to be efficient and effective

The priorities of the Community Plan

Reducing Child Poverty

Improving Mental health and well-being

Improving accessibility and connectivity

3. BACKGROUND

Covid-19 is a coronavirus that has been circulating worldwide since its outbreak in China in December 2019. Guidance on social distancing for everyone in the UK including additional measures for protecting older people and others most vulnerable to the serious impacts of Covid-19 were issued by the UK Government on 16 March 2020.

On 23 March 2020, due to an increase in the spread of the virus and the very serious implications that had, the UK and Scottish Governments introduced stricter measures to slow the spread of Covid-19. The public was required to stay at home (only leaving for certain, limited, reasons) and only permitted to travel if their journey was 'essential'. This had a huge impact on normal life for all of us. It also led to a significant transformation in the delivery of public services nationally and locally. Only services which were essential and could not be delivered remotely continued to be delivered on the ground.

This report outlines the successes and challenges we faced within Angus in responding to the pandemic. It also demonstrates how the crisis brought about a change in public service

delivery, both what we delivered and how this was done. As a result of this change, we have been able to identify opportunities to deliver services differently and more effectively in the future.

On 21 May 2020 the First Minister of Scotland published a route map outlining a process for the lifting of the restrictions that had been imposed and on 28 May confirmed that Scotland would begin to move into the four phases of recovery. This national route map has developed and evolved since then. A local route map for Angus Council and its service delivery has been created based on the national model and is attached at Appendix one for approval. The Angus Council route map needs to be a live document aligned with the Scottish Government's route map for moving through and out of the crisis. It will be informed by the Scottish Government's announcements on the Epidemic Status and the timing of the different phases of the national route map which can change at short notice. COVID-19 is still very much a threat to us. As we have already seen with local outbreaks, infection can spread very quickly and change quite radically the level of restrictions that are imposed in any one area of the country, both on businesses' ability to operate and individuals' freedom of movement.

The Council Plan outlines our strategic priorities which are:

- Economy
- People
- Place
- Efficient and Effective Council

In addition, we have our Finance and Change Plan and Workforce Plan which support these strategic priorities. Rather than create a separate recovery and renewal plan for Angus Council, we have updated the Council Plan and the Workforce Plan to take account of the impact of the pandemic. Each plan is on the agenda today for consideration and approval by members, (214/20). In addition, a report on the Capital and Revenue budget position is on the agenda today for consideration by members. (212/20).

Response Recovery and Renewal

From the date the national restrictions were imposed by Scottish Government, all but essential frontline staff worked from home. In the vast majority of cases, staff were able to do their jobs effectively. This involved a considerable and commendable effort from IT staff to make this possible as well as the engagement and collaboration of staff throughout different services to overcome challenges created by this sudden and unexpected change in work style. A summary of service responses, challenges and successes follows:

Our Staff and How we work

While most staff already had experience of working agilely, remotely and/or at home, for some it was a new experience and recent investment in systems and electronic processes has allowed service delivery to continue with limited disruption in most areas. However, IT and digital solutions have greatly assisted in ensuring staff are connected, and able to collaborate with colleagues and partners. It is recognised that further investment in equipment and IT is required to sustain longer term home working and this is being addressed corporately to support the health and wellbeing of staff. It is recognised that many staff worked long hours, to very tight deadlines and with many competing challenges. Whilst this huge effort by staff is commendable, the resulting impact on health and wellbeing is a serious consideration in determining future staffing resource.

Digital Enablement and IT

Within a matter of days from the announcement to work at home where possible, the Digital Enablement and IT staff had enabled all those who could work from home to do so and ensured that the infrastructure was fit for purpose. Even teams who had not previously embraced agile working were able to move to home working with IT support to do so. When COVID impacted the organisation, IT was part way through a technical programme to implement and test significant improvements in resilience and availability of all IT services. This programme will recommence now as the IT resilience needs of the organisation are even more critical. The Digital and Application Teams quickly provided new fully online processes

to support critical national initiatives including application forms for the Coronavirus Business Support fund and the Humanitarian Angus Response Team (HAART) initiative.

The rollout of MS Teams as part of the Office 365 project was accelerated to facilitate easier collaborative working both internally and with partners. Systems were changed to improve automation and the website developed to better support our customers. The website and Webchat usage significantly increased during the initial lockdown period so we are now building on that shift in customer engagement to provide a better more cost effective service.

HR & Business Support

The HR team developed/amended policies to reflect the rapidly changing environment and to ensure our employees understood the impact of these changes on their working lives and to signpost health and wellbeing support. The HR team also supported the HAART team with contact calls to employees who were shielding. The team quickly adapted processes and ways of working to allow staff to continue to work effectively from home and to ensure employees were paid on time. The Contact Centre was provided with appropriate technology to provide an effective service working from home. This team played a key role in supporting the work of the HAART. Some of our Business Support staff support the work of critical services and have continued to work from council offices throughout but the majority of staff have embraced agile working.

Planning and Communities

Within Planning and Communities there has been a mixed impact across the service. A number of teams (Development Standards, Building Standards, Development Plan and Environment teams) have continued to carry out the majority of their functions, albeit with a number of adaptations in place. Whilst site visits were initially ceased, these have resumed in essential cases with virtual site visits and inspections taking place where possible. The Development Standards Committee has continued to meet and determine applications when required. Whilst some engagement has been possible on projects including the Angus Plan, there will be some impact on work programmes and timescales moving forward.

Within the Communities Team there was a significant impact on the service with the vast majority of face to face provision no longer able to take place. The team has quickly adapted to different ways of working with vulnerable people across Angus and in supporting communities. Officers have teamed up with Voluntary Action Angus (VAA) from the outset to coordinate the MyStreet volunteering and staff were based at their offices to answer and triage calls for support. Officers also worked with VAA staff to liaise and coordinate the significant number of volunteers. Other members of the team were involved in support for the school hubs. Working with individuals and communities has been a challenge but we have maintained regular contact with clients by phone and run online ESOL and cooking groups where possible.

Infrastructure Services

School transport was curtailed as schools closed, and public transport reduced with the team supporting suppliers to maintain essential services for key workers, including for Kirriemuir. Significant planning took place ahead of schools reopening which included the scenario that social distance would be required on school transport. Following the announcement by the Deputy First Minister, that such when social distancing was no longer required, the transport plans for school return were redrafted including public transport use. Public transport timetables have now resumed although passenger numbers remain impacted.

In accordance the Scottish Government's guidance during the initial period of the lockdown, only emergency infrastructure repairs were undertaken, noting that gas testing of council housing was maintained throughout. Re-mobilisation of essential maintenance and subsequently construction sites resumed in accordance with the Scottish Government Route Map and the construction sector plan. Planning, design, and tendering continued whilst staff were working remotely. This included the award of the Arbroath Flood Prevention Scheme and development of Cycling Walking Safer Routes and Housing repairs contracts. Construction has now resumed, with appropriate risk assessments on the Early Years programme including Forfar and Carnoustie Centres with associated reprogramming of all projects impacted by Covid-19. The opportunity to assist social distancing and encourage the ongoing use of active travel has been supported by the Scottish Government and Sustrans with the Council receiving Spaces for People Funding Award and projects are now

being installed following consultation with local members. Key supplier support for Tayside Contracts during lockdown and the construction sector plan has impacted on the available budgets for the remainder of the year, whilst the ability to only undertake minimal emergency works has resulted in a backlog of repairs for our roads, street lights buildings and council houses. We continue to work through the priorities for repairs. Surface dressing activities are being completed albeit several months later than the normal season for works in Angus.

Finance Services

The pandemic has meant significant changes to service delivery being deployed across Revenues & Benefits, Welfare Rights and Finance Services with all staff working from home from late March onwards. Formal debt recovery action was suspended between April and June and staff were redeployed in large numbers to process Business Support Grants, awarding over £21 million in grant payments between April and August. Debt recovery has since recommenced on a phased basis to manage workloads. Adaptions for some staff and services are now being made e.g. to enable Welfare Rights staff to participate in tribunal via video calls.

A key supplier support policy was agreed by Council and implemented in line with national guidance in an effort to support local and regional businesses who provide services to the Council. That work has brought a heavy burden onto the Procurement & Commissioning and Finance teams resulting in some other work being deferred.

The Council's Annual Accounts for 2019/20 were submitted for audit on time and staff have been extremely busy reviewing and revising budgets to maintain the integrity of our financial governance arrangements. Some work has had to be deferred as a consequence but urgent work will be caught up in the coming months.

Legal and Democratic Services

The Council meeting scheduled for 19 March 2020 was cancelled and a Special Council meeting was held remotely using Zoom technology on 3 April 2020 where revised governance arrangements were approved, both in terms of an interim committee structure and interim emergency delegated powers to officers including the setting up of a Special Arrangements Committee and a Special Education Committee. Angus was the first Council in Scotland to meet in this way. These arrangements were in place for several months. The normal cycle of Council and Committee meetings is now taking place, albeit remotely. The emphasis has and is to ensure that the democratic process continues, notwithstanding the major effect the pandemic has had on Council services and staff resources. This was achieved with cross team support particularly from IT staff. Elected Members have adapted well to remote meetings and there is an opportunity to consider in the longer term the cost and time benefits in holding meetings in this way. The Registration Service has adapted extremely well to fundamental changes, including remote registration of deaths; relocation of offices; backlog of birth registrations which were paused for several months; and new rules on outdoor marriages and civil ceremonies. Legal Services were instrumental in ensuring legal compliance with the remote meetings frame-working and process including for quasi-judicial matters such as licensing and planning. The Legal team has provided timely advice on all new emergency coronavirus legislation, including for care homes and reporting of deaths, and has adapted to revised processes for court applications. It is anticipated that as court business restarts, there will be significant backlogs, especially in relation to debt recovery, child protection and adults with incapacity. The Licensing Team has been impacted by changes in legislation which have introduced new rules for dealing with applications and the potential for new enforcement powers. Legal has also provided advice in relation to Key Supplier Support payments as well as supporting colleagues across the Council with queries about data security in relation to home-working and use of various apps and means of communication.

The FM team implemented the re-direction of all council mail to the DRU in Forfar, a digital process for scanning all incoming mail and a process for the printing and issue of all Council mail. A new PPE hub was established so that items of PPE and hygiene products were available to key services. This work has now extended to aid service recovery, most recently supplying the schools with supplies required to manage the safe return of children to educational settings. The team are preparing corporate properties for staff to return to work and are processing 700 DSE requests received. The Scottish Parliament election due to be

held in May 2021, will bring additional challenges to the team and plans are being developed to deliver a COVID safe election.

Education and Lifelong Learning

Reports 179/20,187/20 and 218/20 detail the arrangements and cost associated with the response to Covid 19.

Schools reopened to staff on 11 August and to children and young people from 12 August with all returning full-time from 17 August. Despite all ELC settings not being available due to building delays contingency arrangements have ensured that our “up to 1140 hours offer” is in place.

Education and Lifelong Learning staff continue to respond to updated guidance related to safety and hygiene measures.

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND JUSTICE

Report No 166/20 to Scrutiny and Audit Committee on 16 June 2020 detailed the impact and response to Covid19 by the Children, Families and Justice Service (CFJ). A further report (No 187/20) to Special Angus Council on 16 July 2020 by the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning approved funding for an additional four qualified social workers to support children, young people and families during the recovery phase. Recruitment to these posts has taken place and additional capacity is available to support the Council’s response as our schools and early learning and childcare settings return.

Our performance in relation to direct contact with children on the child protection register, children considered to be vulnerable and individuals who present a risk of serious harm continues to be robust and supported within the existing resource. Staff continue to work flexibly from home, in council buildings and in communities to ensure that needs are met. Our local residential provision continues to operate with a highly committed staff group ensuring that our homes for children are welcoming and safe environments.

A number of partner organisations are now moving incrementally towards a resumption of business, for example Courts and the Children’s Hearing System. This will see a greater demand on social workers time as the need to respond to and facilitate these systems and processes builds back to pre-Covid19 levels.

Strategic Policy, Transformation and Public Sector Reform

Underpinning the council response to the COVID-19 pandemic the communications team supported both the public facing messages as well as our internal staff communications. The main successes were the levels of productivity and creativity. This is a very small team, one however which was regularly stretched to respond and particularly given the huge demand for answers on social media and high public expectations and bearing in mind the need to still deliver day to day business. Working with partners in Angus and regionally, to get messages out to our citizens and staff was also hugely successful with amazing regional working with NHS Tayside P&K and Dundee City Council communications teams which shows that having those relationships in place was very valuable. The organisational development team conducted staff engagement and ran the staff HIVE survey as well as supporting staff with digital and online learning. Staff leadership forums were more frequent, and more engagement and information issued to help our staff in the transition to home working and embedding agile practices. Staff in the strategic policy and planning team were mostly redeployed to the emergency centre and HAART which was essential, and staff showed incredible flexibility and motivation to support those most in need. It did mean however that most corporate and community planning activity was stalled. Economic Development were responsible for administering both the Newly Self Employed Hardship Fund Self-employed support (158 applications approved, totalling £316,000) and the Bed and Breakfast support scheme (5 applications approved totalling £15,000) but also successfully moved to business engagement online and prioritising service delivery in response to business needs and results from a business survey. The Tay Cities Deal staff continued in the main with preparation on business cases and development of projects

Angus Economic Recovery Plan

As members are aware the Economy is a central theme in the Council Plan and has been for the last several years. Supporting the Angus economy and its recovery from the impacts of the pandemic is therefore crucial and the Council has a role here as both a facilitator and major employer.

Paragraph 3.3 (b) of Report 211/20 (Agenda Item 5 refers) includes a principle that “Our budget should continue to recognise the important role which the Council as a local authority must play in responding to and recovering from the pandemic including our place (along with partners) as major employers at a difficult time economically”

As members will be aware unprecedented support and investment in the Scottish economy has been made by the UK and Scottish Governments to try to avert a lengthy economic recession as a consequence of the health emergency measures. There does however remain a risk that despite all of the work and investment a period of recession will endure affecting income and jobs. The Council has relatively limited direct powers e.g. over taxation and even more limited resources to effect economic change but it does have its revenue and capital budgets which will support direct employment and indirect employment in our supply chain. These budgets will continue to be used in this way. The additional investment an uplift to budgets in Reports 211/20 and 212/20 are examples of this commitment.

Among the measures the Council has taken in the last 6 months or is intending to take in the months ahead are:-

- We have paid suppliers and contractors earlier than contractually required
- We have implemented a Key Supplier Support arrangement which has provided funding to key suppliers even when their services have not been required or not able to be provided
- We have prioritised the processing of business support grants (£21m)
- We have provided flexibility on rental payments to our commercial/business tenants
- We have provided funding support to Tayside Contracts as a major employer in the area to allow them to retain and pay their staff
- We are now restarting our General Fund and Housing capital programmes delayed by the health measures including investing additional resources in our roads and property budgets, the spending power of which has been eroded by supplier support payments
- We will continue to encourage and promote contract opportunities for local businesses through direct engagement and where legally permissible by seeking to increase the use of local contractors in our capital and revenue projects.
- We are prioritising necessary projects where government money is available to allow a prompt start to the work.
- We continue to pursue vigorously the conclusion of the Tay Cities Deal
- We have engaged extensively with local businesses through our economic development team

Risk, Resilience & Safety Service

Angus Council activated their emergency response plans, (including the council emergency centre) to the COVID-19 global pandemic early in March 2020. Between January and March 2020, a review of plans, procedures and subsequent briefings were undertaken to ensure preparedness in anticipation of the pandemic impacting, nationally, regionally and locally. The council emergency centre provides the single point of co-ordination for the council's response to and recovery actions from the pandemic. The health and safety team continue to work to full capacity. The primary focus for the team has been to work in response to needs of all services; the main purpose of which has been to keep our workforce safe and comply with health and safety legislation. The relationship with trade unions has also been strengthened throughout this period. Ongoing dialogue continues and sharing of risk assessments and work for comment has been well received. During the pandemic, risks have been (and continue to be) identified and updated, using an operational risk register approach, and aligned to the corporate risk management dashboard. This continues to be monitored through the Incident Management process. Work is ongoing on insurance claims to date as a result of the pandemic.

Internal audit

Our successes include providing real-time audit and counter fraud assurance about new arrangements being put in place in response to the pandemic; delivering the Service Leader's 2019/20 internal audit opinion without reservation despite disruption in completing the annual work programme; continuing with our planned pro-active counter fraud activities; and maintaining our team interaction. Challenges have included capacity issues, in our service due to redeployment to the Emergency Centre, The Counter Fraud team had to suspend face to face meetings and home visits in their investigations, and risk assessment work is underway to allow these to be reinstated. A significant number of audit reviews were halted or delayed. This, and changes in the Council's risk profile and new systems has driven a review of the planned work for 2020/21. A report will be going to the September Scrutiny & Audit Committee which proposes a pool of audit work that includes all previously planned work that has not been completed and new risk areas. Engagement capacity from some services is still limited, so work will be drawn from the pool throughout 2020/21 based on assessment of risk and staff availability to engage with the audit.

Humanitarian Assistance Angus Response Team (HAART)

The Humanitarian Assistance Angus Response Team (HAART) was established when the country went into lockdown at the end of March. This was primarily to support those identified as 'shielding' and others identified as being the most vulnerable in our communities. HAART comprised a multi-disciplinary team of people from Angus Council, Voluntary Action Angus, Angus Health and Social Care Partnership, Angus Alive, food banks, NHS Tayside, Community Planning and other partners who were ready to respond to requests for assistance from people in need including the need for food, fuel, social and emotional support, collection of medication/prescriptions, support for other family members and transport.

The team actively encouraged people to access help and support at an early stage to ensure people were given the opportunity to feel listened to and supported and to access the community, volunteer and professional support that they needed. The team led on efforts locally and coordinated the work required to help our most isolated and vulnerable residents. The response included a new website (www.taysidecares.co.uk) and phone number linked to the national helpline, to help any isolated and vulnerable Angus residents get the support they needed during the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic.

Since 'Shielding' was paused on 31 July, the team has transitioned into a business as usual approach that will continue to support citizens throughout the next phase of the pandemic. A full report on the HAART response was considered by the Council at its meeting on 12 August 2020 ([Report 191/20](#) refers).

Housing

Just before lockdown started the Housing Service moved into its emergency operating model in line with its business continuity plan. Routine Allocations and Repairs were suspended, whilst Planned Maintenance and Capital Projects, including new-build sites were shut down. An agreement was put in place with one contractor to provide an emergency repair service, and in line with Government guidelines Gas Safety inspections continued to be carried out, in compliance with legislative duties. This was challenging at times, because of the need to respect shielding requirements.

Sheltered Housing communal lounges were closed and remain closed at this time.

Although Homelessness presentations reduced at the point of lockdown, there has been significant pressure on temporary accommodation. As all households were staying put, there was no throughput from temporary to permanent accommodation. Coupled with the fact that vacant properties could not have repairs carried out to prepare them for occupation, this created a log jam effect. However, good links with Private Rented Sector landlords emerged during the crisis which helped us find creative outcomes for a number of customers, and this will form a foundation for wider accommodation options in the mid to long term.

Although we saw an increase in people fleeing domestic abuse, we were able to assist all those who needed help with accommodation. The Council also successfully met the requirements of the early release programme for prisoners coming back to Angus.

Rent arrears have increased during the Pandemic, but a national moratorium on evictions has meant that action has been severely limited. This has also put limitations on actions to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour.

Recovery began in July, with the backlog of customer enquiries being dealt with initially, followed by a return to a full repair and allocation service on 10th August. Through the recovery phases, there is now a focus on re-starting transfer led allocations while retaining a focus on the statutory groups.

Our Environmental Services team have had the challenge of continuing to deliver critical services, such as household waste collections and burial services, throughout the lockdown period. As restrictions have been eased further services have been reintroduced including grounds maintenance, recycling centres and public toilets. The need to comply with relevant guidance and introduce additional control measures to keep the public and staff safe has required a redesign to the way we deliver many of our services, for example a booking system at recycling centres. The changes made have worked effectively and have ensured that key services have remained operational and available to the public.

ANGUS HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE PARTNERSHIP

The Angus HSCP has been strongly committed to managing the pandemic since mid- March 2020. Although the Partnership is attempting to enter a Recovery phase, it still has many of its resources deployed to COVID-19 work and will continue to do so in the medium term whilst the risk of a second wave and the reality of localised outbreaks prevail. Nonetheless, the Partnership is looking to learn from its experiences as it considers what the “new normal” should look like; although many of the Partnership’s service deal with direct, hands-on care, the pandemic has encouraged a focus on different methods of intervention, such as the expansion of Technology Enabled Care and more the flexible application of SDS. Community health services are in the early stages of returning to normal delivery but the backlog in some areas of work will be challenging. There are particular concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and substance misuse, with resultant concerns about adult protection issues.

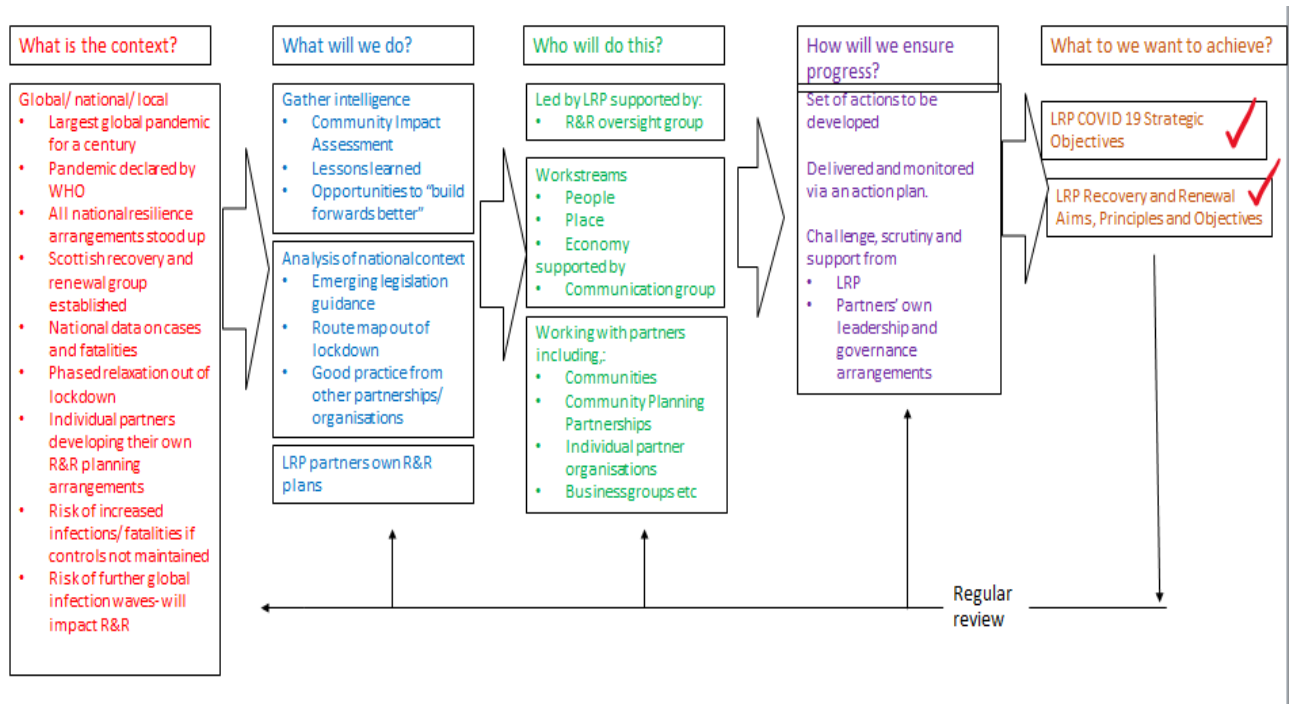
The residential care home sector remains fragile and maintaining resistance to the pandemic is still resource intensive around professional assurance visits, PPE supply, the testing regime and family visiting. The Partnership’s approach of combining support and scrutiny has proven effective in limiting the impact on care homes, but there has been a reduced demand for places which, if it continues after COVID-19, will change the care home market in Angus; this is being considered using a scenario planning approach. Care at home has, in contrast, increased in weekly provision from 10,300 hours in February to 11,000 hours in August 2020; to date, this has been manageable, but it will present real capacity challenges if growth at this rate continues after the pandemic ends. National Guidance is awaited from the Scottish Government to reopen day care, LD Day Centres and planned respite. Care management activity is increasing, with teams operating to a risk priority system.

[Angus HSCP COVID-19 Remobilisation Plan](#)

TAYSIDE LOCAL RESILIENCE PARTNERSHIP (TLRP)

Throughout the pandemic, and in accordance with agreed resilience and incident management arrangements, the TLRP has been meeting to ensure an integrated strategic response across the many partners involved in dealing with Coronavirus and its impacts.

The TLRP has agreed a framework to guide its support and leadership on recovery and renewal across the Tayside area and this is summarised in the diagram below. The important role of individual partners’ recovery and renewal plans is highlighted.



4. CURRENT POSITION

(i) Phase 3

We are now in Phase three of the Scottish Government's route map. In terms of our recovery some restrictions have been lifted and consequently some more services have been allowed to recommence operations directly, albeit it with social distancing and health and safety controls in place. Other aspects of our services are still limited by the restrictions in place. The clear guidance from Scottish Government, even in Phase 4, is that working from home and working flexibly remains encouraged. There are several unknowns in our planning for recovery, such as dates for further phases, potential changes to social distancing guidelines and the risk of resurgence of the virus which has already led to restrictions being re-imposed in some localities.

Services have assessed their position in terms of service delivery and have prepared plans in line with the Scottish Government's route map. The recovery of council's services has been set out in line with the phased lifting of restrictions but also in consideration of the council's ambitions and strategic priorities as detailed in the Council Plan on the four priorities of Economy; People; Place and being an Efficient and Effective Council. The experience and lessons learned from Covid-19 to-date have helped inform some of our future planning and transition as well as our updated Council Plan, Finance and Change Plan and Workforce Plan.

Whilst all council services have been making recovery plans, it is important to recognise that these plans are informed by and dependent on guidance issued by the Scottish Government. We are therefore working in a changing, fluid and ambiguous landscape which necessitates frequent reviews of our plans and our planning assumptions. In developing these plans consideration requires to be given to staff and their wellbeing as well as ensuring appropriate use of assets and finances in terms of best value and compliance with our legal obligations.

Without doubt, the pandemic has created huge challenges and problems worldwide. It has had tragic consequences for many families who have lost loved ones or experienced serious illness. It has wreaked havoc on economies and in turn individual livelihoods. It has touched all our lives. Our public services in Angus have had to respond to the pandemic in a way that has never happened before. Meeting this challenge has led to a huge and commendable collaborative effort across all agencies and communities who have come together to do the right thing for those in need. It has required individuals to work in ways that were not thought possible; whether that be it conducting an effective meeting from their kitchen engaging many participants or creating in a matter of days the HAART centre to meet the needs of the most

vulnerable in our communities. Valuable lessons were learned in these endeavours. The importance of building on these and not losing momentum was quickly recognised.

(ii) Recovery & Renewal Strategic Group

A Recovery & Renewal Strategic Group was formed, led by Jackie Buchanan, comprising the Directors and Interim Chief Integration Officer at the Council with a remit to

- Consider the art of the possible including the significant opportunities to change the way the Council works
- Engage with Stakeholders in developing change – Staff, Public, Elected Members and Partner Organisations
- Provide Strategic Direction and Support to the Recovery/Renewal Initiatives that were taking place across the Council
- Provide oversight of the evolving financial dimension

In terms of recovery & renewal several sub-groups have been formed as detailed in Appendix 2 of this report with their remits as detailed.

(iii) What we have learned

We are still assessing the lesson learned from our experiences during COVID. Below are some examples to-date.

- **Protecting the vulnerable** – the HAART project as outlined in this report and as detailed in Report number 191/20 is a great example of how a holistic partnership approach to support service delivery was key in the operational success of an initiative established to support and protect the vulnerable in our communities during COVID.
- **Collaboration** has worked exceptionally well despite the constraints of remote meetings, both within and across Councils teams, as well as with the public in Angus and with partners across Tayside. The sense of common goal was undoubtedly a significant factor but the intention is to build on the relationships established and ways of working for future collaboration.
- **Agile Working** Agile working, whilst not without its challenges and limitations has proved to be a huge success. A Hive Survey conducted across the Council seeking the views of office based staff found that many people now recognise that much of their roles can be successfully fulfilled outwith a traditional office setting and that for many, there is a willingness and desire to work remotely for a greater proportion of time than before lockdown. There is an appetite for office space to be used to enhance team and collaborative working across the organisation. We are reviewing the agile workstyles of posts across the organisation to reflect that many roles which were previously seen as requiring more time in the office can be successfully carried out from home. This will have a positive impact on our work space planning and requirements in the future, our ability to recruit staff and on our carbon footprint.
- **Culture** Since March there has been a shift in the organisational culture, to one of increased kindness, understanding and care towards colleagues at all levels. As often happens in response to a crisis, teams across the organisation have pulled together and this led to an increased sense of togetherness and shared purpose. Through regular virtual opportunities for leaders at different levels to come together, we are starting to consider what work needs to be undertaken to ensure the culture shift can be retained and embedded.

(iv) Art of the possible

Prior to the pandemic, the Corporate Leadership Team had begun to develop thinking in relation to the overarching strategic direction of the organisation. This work aims to set out the future purpose for Angus Council services linked to our strategic priorities of the Council Plan. This purpose will be a single page built around four main themes of create, reduce, eliminate and raise. During the pandemic it was very clear that the purpose of our services all needed to face towards protecting health and lives. This clarity of purpose meant that services could all work together collaboratively, and with partners to achieve that common goal. The strategy on a page work is now being developed to ensure that clarity of purpose results in better collaborative effort and resources being directed to what matters most for normal business in a post pandemic world.

The strategy on a page has been considered by leadership forums and is now being drawn together for a wider engagement with Angus Council members, staff and communities. It is hoped that this will help to inform the Council's Budget Setting meeting, likely to be held in February 2021, alongside a revised Council Plan, Finance & Change Plan and Workforce Plan.

It is intended that the strategy on a page will help better communicate the council's purpose as well as provide a framework for leadership over the medium to long term.

(v) Engagement events with elected members

With current restrictions re face to face sessions continuing engagement with elected members will be online. Elected members have embraced digital working and continued to have council meetings online throughout the pandemic and therefore our engagement with them will continue in this way for the time being.

(vi) Engagement events with communities

Whilst face to face sessions with groups and individuals were stopped as a result of the travel restrictions and social distancing guidelines, various teams within the Council have continued to engage with people and communities through a number of different platforms.

As well as contributing to the HAART to support those who were shielding, officers have continued to contact individuals and groups to support them through the lockdown period. A number of different platforms were investigated in anticipation of the roll out of Microsoft Teams and it is apparent that there may still be a need for a range of platforms to suit capability and access. The importance of contact, conversation and support has been clear. As schools and early learning settings prepared to re-open in August relevant advice and guidance was shared on Angus Council webpages and other social media platforms. Head Teachers maintained contact with their school communities. GLOW questionnaires were used to gather the views of parents/carers and young people to help school staff understand what learning at home had been like.

In engaging with communities, officers have noted a number of recurring themes including mental health and wellbeing, poverty and employment, digital issues and the effect of the lockdown on children and youths. These issues will help shape activity as we move through the phases of recovery.

A significant amount of work has now been undertaken to enable us to restart some of the face to face sessions and a more imaginative approach has had to be taken with sessions planned in outdoor spaces and more online and digital engagement where appropriate.

5. PROPOSALS

- 5.1 In terms of this report, Council is asked to note Angus Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic as outlined in paragraph four including its successes and challenges as well as the opportunities and lessons learned to inform future service delivery and ways of working. Members are also asked to note Angus Council's Route Map attached as Appendix one to this report and note the Recovery and Renewal proposals and initiatives. These will continue to be developed taking on board the impact of COVID, including on the whole way in which we now live and work.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The impact of the pandemic on the Council's finances has been the subject of regular updates to Full Council and the Special Arrangements Committee in recent months and those updates have made clear the significant impact both in the current financial year and potentially beyond.
- 6.2 Separate reports covering proposed revisions to the 2020/21 Revenue Budget and Capital Budget are on the agenda for consideration at this meeting of the Council (Reports 211/20 and 212/20 refer). The recommendations in this report and the route map set out at Appendix 1 have been taken into account in the proposed revisions to budgets covered in those reports.
- 6.3 In the same way as the Council's route map will have to be kept under regular review so too will the financial implications for the Council. Any further revisions to budgets required due to changing circumstances will be brought to members for consideration.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 It will be important to ensure continued compliance with government advice and guidance on public health matters. All recovery and renewal initiatives detailed in this report will be assessed for equality implications as well as the Fairer Scotland duty, as appropriate.

8. CONSULTATION (IF APPLICABLE)

- 8.1 All Angus Council directorates and Angus Health and Social Care Partnership have contributed to this report. Discussions are being held with community planning partners on recovery and reform priorities.

NOTE: No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

REPORT AUTHOR: Jackie Buchanan Director of Legal and Democratic Services

EMAIL DETAILS: buchananj@angus.gov.uk

List of Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Route Map

Appendix 2 – Recovery and Renewal Groups with remits