

**ANGUS COUNCIL**

**ANGUS COUNCIL COMMITTEE – 24 JUNE 2021**

**COVID-19 – RESPONSE, RECOVERY AND RENEW**

**REPORT BY MARGO WILLIAMSON – CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update on Angus Council's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic including the transition into recovery, aligned to the 'Scottish Government Strategic Framework Protection Levels'.

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Council:

- (i) Notes Angus Council's further response work to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- (ii) Notes the ongoing and proposed recovery and response initiatives; and
- (iii) Notes the Recovery and Renew Strategic Framework.

**2. ALIGNMENT TO THE ANGUS COUNCIL PLAN AND COMMUNITY PLAN**

This report contributes to the following strategic priorities in the Angus Council Plan which are based upon, people, place, economy and our business.

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 are to:

- Reduce child poverty
- Improve mental health and well-being improving accessibility and connectivity.

**3. BACKGROUND**

The declaration of a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation in March 2020, and the subsequent impact within the UK has been unprecedented. This has created an abundance of challenges for our citizens, our communities, businesses, and our council.

Angus Council and our partners have continued to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, alongside the implementation of the test and protect programme, community testing protocols and the various levels of restrictions, that have been applied by Scottish Government. As the COVID-19 vaccination programme continues to be rolled out across the country, our attention is focused on how we transition and stabilise into recovery. However, we also need to be mindful that COVID-19 as a virus, will remain with us for months and potentially years. Therefore, we must ensure that our approach remains flexible and adaptable, and ready to escalate should there be further outbreaks, peaks and/or challenges. We must also be aware of other and concurrent risks that may require an emergency response.

As a council we need to take stock and reflect on the work to date and the recovery work that has commenced. We must also have regard to the Scottish Government's COVID-19 restrictions, guidance and information and the various daily updates.

Angus Council's plan sets a clear vision; Angus is a great place to live, work and visit, and this was detailed in the Council Plan 2019-2024 which was approved and published in 2019. As a result of the pandemic and the simultaneous impact globally, nationally and locally, priorities have continued to be reassessed. We must consider how best we support recovery and renew activities over the short, medium and longer term. We continue to review our approach, through experience, learning and debriefs. As a result, a revised plan was submitted to council in September 2020 and in March 2021, reaffirming our commitment to our four strategic priorities. As we continue to face the challenges presented by and because of the pandemic, and mindful that its full impact is yet to be realised we reaffirm our commitment to these priorities.

- 1. Angus to be a go-to place for businesses**
- 2. To maximise inclusion and reduce inequalities**
- 3. Our communities to be strong, resilient and led by citizens**
- 4. Angus Council to be efficient and effective.**

The principles and ethos of recovery are very much in line with our priorities and supports the ongoing delivery of our services as we reimagine and transition more into recovery. Subsequently, a Recovery and Renew Strategic Framework has been produced by the chief executive and this was approved by the Gold Group in May 2021. This outlines the key elements of the approach to recovery, the integration with existing priorities, demands, partnerships, plans and policies. It also underpins the ethos of the council's values and puts people at the heart of all that we do. The framework is outlined at appendix 2.

#### **4. CURRENT POSITION**

As we proceed and transition into recovery from the impact of COVID-19, we are in the unique position of being able to redefine the way that we work and potentially "fast forward" new ways of working. Our learning from the past year is essential to how we influence and shape our future. We need to understand what has worked well, the opportunities for change and or reducing/stopping some of the things we did prior to COVID-19.

Our response to date has presented opportunities and increased the demands on many of our services. We have reported our response and actions to Angus Council and will continue to do so. We also know there are many knowns and unknowns at this stage, and that the full effects will not be known for some time. The council's annual governance statement 2020/2021 also refers to the demands and impacts on services.

As work progresses, our transition to a fuller recovery programme is now well underway. We continue to monitor the Scottish Government guidance and apply it accordingly. Our services have continued to deliver and adapt and will continue to do so. The detail contained in appendix 1, outlines some of the recovery work and service delivery across the council.

In terms of Strategic Policy developments, throughout 2020/21 the strategic priorities and direction were explored as part of the Council Plan Performance Report and Community Plan developments. This was initially done under the banner of Demand Management however as the Tay Cities Deal work has progressed and Communities become central to supporting local people, Angus Council and partners have started to work towards Community Wealth Building (CWB) principles. A lot of local activity is in line with CWB however to strengthen this approach we will be undertaking a Service Design exercise focusing on the key priorities and development areas. This approach will include co-production with local communities and a customer focused view – this is essential if we are to provide the services people need when they need them and in the most effective way – in partnership.

#### **5. PROPOSALS**

In terms of this report, Council is asked to note Angus Council's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic; notes the transition to recovery and renew initiatives and the production of the Recovery and Renew Strategic Framework.

## 6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The impact of the pandemic on the council's finances has been the subject of regular updates to Full Council in recent months and those updates have made clear the significant impact in the 2020/21 financial year, in the current financial year (2021/22) and potentially beyond.

The council's recovery and renew work will be kept under regular review so too will the financial implications for the council. One-off COVID-19 funding allocated to the council will also provide flexibility to support our recovery and renewal work, potentially over the medium term if funds allow. Any further revisions to budgets required due to changing circumstances will be brought to members for consideration.

## 7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

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

## 8. CONSULTATION

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 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.

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List of Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Response Recovery and Renew

Appendix 2 – Recovery & Renew Strategic Framework

## ANGUS TO BE A GO-TO PLACE FOR BUSINESSES

### Supporting businesses and the economy

- Angus Council has been administering COVID-19 business support funds on behalf of the Scottish Government since March 2020. These funds have been aimed at giving financial support for businesses across a variety of sectors and sizes to combat the effects of the local and national COVID-19 restrictions and protective measures introduced by the Scottish Government.
- Angus Council paid out 4,597 grants totalling £42,533,275 across 16 different funds.
- The Angus Council Discretionary Fund, which offers grants to those businesses that had received no support since October 2020 is still open for applications
- Environmental and Consumer Protection is leading the enforcement of Angus Council's public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Officers have been authorised as relevant persons under the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 (as amended).

The response involves dealing with complaints, concerns and requests for advice regarding social and physical distancing measures that are in place to help combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The enforcement approach is proportionate and pragmatic, following the 4Es: Engage, Explain, Encourage, Enforce. This mirrors the approach being taken by Police Scotland who are co-regulators for these regulations.

Compliance with COVID-19 Regulations and Guidance by Angus businesses has generally been good, however, officers have responded to 689 complaints and enquiries related to non-compliance and business advice since the first lockdown in March last year.

Since the relaxation of restrictions in May of this year ECP have moved towards a more proactive response to inspection and intervention which involves officers carrying out inspection and assessment of premises identified as being potentially non-compliant with COVID-19 Regulations. An Environmental Health Officer was recruited in April 2021 to carry out enforcement work specific to COVID-19 control with the post being funded by the Scottish Government.

Work is ongoing to ensure that the service is ready to fully recommence programmed inspection work relating to food law, private water supplies, weights and measures and animal feed as soon as it is safe to do so.

## TO MAXIMISE INCLUSION AND REDUCE INEQUALITIES

### Making a difference

- Child Poverty Action Report – 148/19 2019 & 268/20 2020 outlines the approach to reducing child poverty in Angus. This has seen a targeted approach during the pandemic and continues to ensure that support and resources are supporting families.
- Officers have formed a grants group and is engaging internally with council services and with third sector partners to identify specific support needs and opportunities in our communities arising from the pandemic. The grants group is assessing requests for funding from specific COVID-19 response funding provided from the Scottish Government. The use of these funds was reported to Council in May 2021 (report 137/21 refers) and further proposals will come before members in the months ahead.
- The initial Children, Families and Justice Directorate response to COVID-19 was reported to Scrutiny and Audit Committee, 16th June 2020 (report 16/20 refers). The arrangements as reported at that time remain broadly in place with appropriate adjustments having been made in accordance with the easing or tightening of restrictions and in response to revised Scottish Government Guidance.

- A further specific report detailing our response to the legislative reduction in the number of outstanding unpaid work hours was presented to Policy and Resources Committee, 9 March 2021 (report 89/21 refers). On 14 April 2021, the Chief Medical Officer wrote to local authorities approving the restarting of unpaid work activity on 19 April 2021 and further grant monies have been made available by Scottish Government to support service to address the backlog of hours.
- Recent reports to the Children and Learning Committee outlined further key activity undertaken by the Children, Families and Justice Directorate to maximise inclusion and reduce inequalities for those working with the service (reports 145/21 and 40/21 refer).
- Social work services continue to review the levels of demand across protecting people arrangements with routine reporting to the multi-agency Chief Officers Group and Scottish Government. Our performance has been consistent with trends across Scotland.
- The impact of COVID-19 on equalities, and the council's response, is reported on throughout the council's Equality Mainstreaming Report and Equality Outcomes 2021 –2023, which can be found here.

[https://www.angus.gov.uk/committees/policy\\_and\\_resources\\_committee/policy\\_and\\_resources\\_committee\\_8\\_june\\_2021](https://www.angus.gov.uk/committees/policy_and_resources_committee/policy_and_resources_committee_8_june_2021)

- The Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate has taken a series of response and recovery updates for consideration by Elected Members. The earlier reports in the series set out the immediate recovery plans being put in place to enable all children and young people to return to school in August 2020. Later reports have provided updates as the academic session progressed and set out further plans for session 2021 and beyond. Within these updates, information has been provided about increased staffing, safety measures in place in all Angus schools, financial support provided to eligible families and actions designed to increase digital inclusion. Full details can be found in the reports listed below.

[Report 179/20](#) – Recovery and Resilience – Steps for Angus Schools

[Report 187/20](#) – Recovery and Resilience – Education Current and Indicative Costs

[Report 218/20](#) – Recovery and Resilience – Update on Education Recovery

[Report 282/20](#) – Education Recovery and Resilience Update

[Report 143/21](#) – Education Recovery and Resilience Update

### **Angus Health & Social Care Partnership and Voluntary Action Angus Colleagues**

- The Angus HSCP have a remobilisation plan (COVID-19 Re-mobilisation: Next phase of Health and Social Care Response Recovery and Renewal April 2021 – March 2022) which details the work being undertaken to ensure the provision of safe and effective care of adult health and provision for the residents of Angus. This plan outlines priorities being undertaken to achieve recovery and renewal in a safe manner. The partnership continues to work through the challenges presented to us by maintaining COVID-19 pathways whilst remaining focussed on mitigating the spread of the disease across our population and minimising the unintended consequences that have potentially arisen over the past year. This plan is supported by an implementation action plan, accompanied by progress reporting and governance arrangements. We continue to work closely with Angus Council, NHS Tayside and a range of other key stakeholders in terms of response, recovery and renewal for the people of Angus.

## **OUR COMMUNITIES TO BE STRONG, RESILIENT AND LED BY CITIZENS**

### **Enabling and empowering**

- The Community Plan Performance report 266/20 outlines the work done to deliver on the partnership priorities noted above. 266/20 outlines the work done to deliver on the partnership priorities.
- Through the Transforming Services work with the third sector a charter has been developed to make contracting and grants more effective at tackling local need.

- The work of the grants group has supported and underpinned the work being delivered by community groups and the third sector and has been vital in supporting our citizens and communities.

## **ANGUS COUNCIL TO BE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE.**

### **Delivering our business**

#### **Legal and Democratic Services**

- Legal Services continue to provide advice in relation to legal duties and statutory requirements during recovery, including in relation to any changes to the COVID-19 legislation.
- Legal Services support other services as they recover from the pandemic in terms of any relevant legal advice or action.
- Remote meetings of Council and committees have continued to take place and Committee Services continue to adapt and support in this area.
- Centralisation of all council mail to the Central Mailing Unit – this project which was initiated at the start of lockdown in March 2020, is progressing. The council now has one mailing address and we have introduced the process of issuing all mail by second class mail unless urgent to further reduce outgoing mailing costs.
- The facilities management team are leading on the procurement and installation of a desk booking system as part of the council's agile programme and will work closely with the project team on the re-opening of main council offices, as required.
- The facilities management team will continue to procure and issue personal protective equipment to all non-care council services.

#### **Finance**

- All services of the Directorate have continued to operate a full service since July 2020 albeit with remote working and some services such as Welfare Rights have had to adapt to different models of provision due to COVID-19 restrictions. A grant register has been developed to keep track of the multitude of grants and other funding provided to the council to respond to the pandemic. This will help to ensure the council is making best use of funding available and maximising what can be provided as support to businesses and people in Angus.

#### **HR & Business Support**

- HR, staffing and payroll have continued to develop, update, and communicate changes to processes, procedures, policies, and guidance in response to government and national guidance and to support council initiatives e.g., Agile Programme.
- HR meetings with managers/staff/trade unions/elected members continue to be conducted virtually.
- Business support has continued to fully operate and support all services since March 2020 and throughout this period has taken on additional short-term tasks (e.g., administration of taxi grants) and longer-term tasks (e.g., supporting the administration of online committee meetings).
- Business support is now undertaking a more fundamental review of processes, involving relevant services, to ensure that where possible, processes are automated,
- Since March 2020 Business support has paid invoices totalling £93m.
- The Contact Centre has supported our citizens and communities throughout the pandemic, initially prioritising emergencies, and vulnerable situations. The Contact Centre will continue to support the council's pandemic response as required, including through the provision of the Test and Protect service.
- The Contact Centre has embedded new processes for Housing and will continue to engage with other services as their recovery and renewal plans develop, to understand and adapt to future needs.

## **Digital Enablement and IT**

All services have operated since the beginning of lockdown in March 2020 and the introduction of rapid development of digital automated COVID-19 related services, provision of end user devices including remote support for staff working at home and completed broadband rollout and associated services for the remaining 5 hard to reach schools.

As we move to recovery work has commenced to:

- Design of supporting technologies to enable a more virtual council.
- Develop a corporate council wide application strategy to ensure a more cost-effective approach to both user and system support.
- Automate interfacing will improve data quality, reduce the need for manual intervention and rekeying, and enable process redesign and process automation.
- Further O365 functionality.
- Implement a new customer focussed portal-based Service Desk tool for Schools and Corporate.
- Improve bandwidth and resilience across Angus.
- To assess options and costs for hybrid committee meetings to enable greater accessibility.

## **Infrastructure**

During this period Infrastructure services have continued to deliver the majority of services as far as possible within the COVID-19 guidelines notably for construction, with the following contribution to our COVID-19 response and recovery:

- Worked to arrange, coordinate and manage mass vaccination centres in Arbroath, Forfar and Montrose which commenced 7 June 2021.
- Assisted in the arrangements for ongoing testing facilities in various car parks across the county
- Assisted in to ensure safe operation of our buildings including introducing social distancing requirements and ventilation arrangements for schools, offices and election premises.
- Early Years Centres in Forfar and Carnoustie which were delayed due to the initial lockdown are now completed. We ensured where possible that the other delayed Early Years Programme projects were progressed and completed as COVID-19 guidance allowed. Improvement works in live schools which were delayed from school summer holidays in 2020 are reprogrammed for this year.
- Liaised with ANGUSalve to ensure buildings operated by them could re-open in line with the COVID-19 guidance being applied at the time.
- Whilst restrictions allowed only emergency housing repairs until the end of April 2021, arrangements are in place to progress reported repairs. In the interim the work to voids in the housing stock have maximised repairs and upgrades.
- Car parking charges remain suspended, and our warden resources are assisting to manage appropriate parking at tourism destinations to assist with the vision that Angus is a great place to live, work and visit, as we anticipate an increase in staycations and visitor numbers.
- Arbroath Harbour has continued to provide a full service to visitors and users in line with COVID-19 restrictions.
- We are completing the Spaces for Everyone measures introduced to assist with social distancing requirements with temporary reduced speed limits in towns and villages.

- As part of recovery, we are reviewing our agile programme in light of the working from home experience. Discussions with teams and employee engagement sessions are informing our potential arrangements ahead of lifting restrictions allowing return to offices.
- Agile programme alteration works to County Buildings and Bruce House recommenced and were completed.

### **Environmental Services – Waste, Parks and Burial Services**

- We have been able to adapt our operations to ensure that essential services such as household bin collections and burial services have continued to be delivered uninterrupted since the beginning of the pandemic.
- We have also proactively introduced operational changes and additional control measures that has ensured our parks and green spaces have been maintained to a high standard since the beginning of the pandemic.
- We have monitored and responded to national guidance as it has changed and have reopened our public facilities when able to do so. For example, we have applied additional safety measures to allow our play areas, recycling centres and public toilets to reopen.

### **Risk, Resilience & Safety**

- The team continue to be at the heart of the ongoing response to and recovery from COVID-19. The council emergency centre and incident management approach, work on testing and the vaccination programme, the health and safety of our staff and volunteers, alongside the demands of day-to-day work that must be undertaken. The team continues to offer support to all Directorates as they deliver services to our citizens.

### **Governance & Change**

- The governance and change team continue to support the delivery of the current Change Programme and lead the development of the next phase of 'Developing our Change Programme' for the next few years. This is strongly connected to the work relating to recovery & renew as the organisation continues to respond to the needs of citizens and communities across angus – the changes required to service delivery will dovetail with the Change Programme in due course. The Performance Led programme has also re-started to support our continuous improvement work, including making better use of our data. The quality improvement and performance team are also heavily involved in keeping the corporate data dashboard up to date to assist the emergency management response. The corporate governance work has also been progressed to provide ongoing assurance that the council operates in a manner which has the necessary control frameworks in place, including those relating to the emergency response. Work with key partners through the strategic commissioning function is ongoing with particular emphasis on supporting the ANGUSalve Transformation Project which is key to the future sustainability of that organisation, while maintaining close liaison with Tayside Contracts,