Recovery and Renewal Strategy

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Contents

1.   **Introduction**

1.1   The Council's Recovery Strategy was agreed by the Executive in June 2020. Since then the country has seen a second wave of the Covid-19 Pandemic with an expectation that there may be a third. There have been two further national (and local) Lockdowns, and more positively the commencement of a national vaccination programme. On February 22nd the Prime Minister announced a Roadmap to reducing Covid-19 restrictions with a hope that all current social restrictions would end by June 2021.

1.2   Since June 2020 the Council has taken a range of actions to implement its first Recovery Strategy. In addition, the Economic Development Strategy (2019-2036) has been revised to ensure it reflects the challenges and opportunities that Covid-19 present, and a new Communications and Engagement Strategy (2020-2023) has also been approved which embraces key elements of the original Recovery Strategy. Another year has also provided the opportunity to reflect more on Covid-19, its impact, and on our local communities' response to it.

1.3   It is also relevant to note that the Council is now approaching the mid-point in its Council Strategy (2019- 2023). The Strategy reflects the Council's ambitions for West Berkshire over the medium term and the associated Delivery Plan articulates how those ambitions will be delivered and progress measured.

1.4   It is usual to both refresh the Strategy and Delivery Plan half way through the planning cycle and that is what we will be doing in May 2021. This is the subject of a separate paper but this Recovery and Renewal Strategy has been updated to ensure that the key actions reflected within it are included, where appropriate, within the revised Council Strategy Delivery Plan.

2.   **Background**

2.1   The original Recovery Strategy set out some of the key challenges and opportunities that West Berkshire and the Council have faced during the Covid-19 Pandemic. These have been updated and are set out in Appendix 1 under the headings of health and social; economic; environmental and organisational impacts.

2.2   The key challenges that drive this updated Recovery and Renewal Strategy include:

- Covid-19 has had a disproportionate health impact on vulnerable groups, namely older people, those with disabilities and ethnic minorities.
- Economically, the impact has been most felt by younger age groups, women, and poorer households.
- Socially, the impact has probably been more widespread but with those living alone, those with mental health and emotional wellbeing issues, and children and young people appear to have been most impacted.
- Lockdown has created a range of concerns amongst children and young people with schools having been closed for a prolonged period of time.
- Lockdown has also meant that some services have not been provided and some issues and concerns have probably been hidden from view.

- Acute hospitals have had to cope with an unprecedented number of Covid-19 inpatients. This has led to a large number of planned operations and screenings being cancelled. This is likely to bring further health issues.
- The West Berkshire economy has not been as impacted as elsewhere. Hospitality, leisure, wholesale and retail have been the worst affected.
- The economic sectors that are set to expand in West Berkshire over the medium term have generally not been as badly impacted during the Pandemic.
- Town centres have been particularly adversely affected.
- More broadly, the economic impact of an ongoing recession needs to be considered including its potential impact on future public finances.
- The 'inequality gap' in West Berkshire is likely to have grown as a result of the Pandemic and this is perhaps the biggest overriding concern.

2.3   Not everything has been negative. Some of the opportunities to be seized include:

- Given reducing labour supply, high job density and anticipated strong demand for labour, the general prospects for the local labour market coming out of the Pandemic look relatively positive.
- The Pandemic has promoted effective partnership working across a range of agencies. This has perhaps been most noticeable between health and adult social care.
- There has been a digital revolution that has taken a lot of interaction on line. Much of this is likely to remain in some form.
- There has been a noticeable resurgence in community spirit.
- The Pandemic has seen a reduction in travel and an increase in air quality. There has also been a shift towards active travel with walking and cycling coming to the fore. There also appears to have been a renewed interest in the environment and countryside.

3.   **Vision**

3.1   The Vision set out in the original Strategy remains largely unchanged although the final sentence has been redrafted to place a greater emphasis on addressing inequalities:

To recover three of the core elements that make West Berkshire a great place to live; health, education and the economy, and to ensure a renewed and enhanced focus on our community, environment and engagement. Our Strategy is for everyone but in particular those most affected, now, and into the future by the Covid-19 Pandemic.

4.   **Our Priorities for Recovery and Renewal**

4.1   The original Strategy identified six priorities and a number of associated critical success factors. Given developments over the past year, and the work that has already been completed, the opportunity has been taken to bring these together and to refocus them into seven priorities. The original themes have been retained. The seven priorities are:

1. Recovering West Berkshire's health and social wellbeing to ensure we remain one of the healthiest places in the country, whilst at the same time doing more to address health inequalities.
2. Ensuring economic recovery and renewal, with a focus on those who have lost their jobs, notably the young, women and the disadvantaged; supporting those sectors most impacted by Covid-19; and ensuring we continue the journey of repurposing our Town Centres for the future.
3. Supporting our children and young people and our schools with a focus on the most vulnerable.
4. Taking the opportunity to work with our local communities to accelerate the delivery of our environmental objectives.
5. Enhancing our communications and community engagement.
6. Improving our customers' experience of us with an enhanced efficiency and openness in how we work and share information.
7. Seizing the positives from the Pandemic but not forgetting those we have lost; those whose lives will be forever changed; and those who have supported our local communities during the Pandemic, including our own staff.

5.   Delivering our Priorities

5.1   Our seven priorities cover both recovery and renewal. Recovery can perhaps be described as getting back to where we were before the Pandemic struck. Renewal is creating something better, through focusing on the good things that have come out of the past year or so.

5.2   In this chapter the key actions that we intend to take in support of our seven priorities, in some cases with our partners, are set out. These actions seek to ensure that we place our communities in the best possible position to recover from the Pandemic but also build on the new opportunities that Covid-19 has brought. Appendix 2 sets out the actions in detail. In some cases work is already well underway and is encompassed within existing strategies. In other instances further work is still required because we do not yet fully understand all the implications of the Pandemic.

1)   Recovering West Berkshire's health and social wellbeing to ensure we remain one of the healthiest places in the country, whilst at the same time doing more to address health inequalities.

5.3   There are six key themes that underpin our approach within this Priority:

- *Closing the inequality gap.* This existed prior to Covid-19 and was highlighted both in West Berkshire 2036 and the Council Strategy 2019-2023. The Pandemic seems likely to have created an even wider gap. In moving forward it is important that we have a full understanding of the issues that need to be addressed, ensure there is effective engagement with the affected communities and that the impact is measured and learning taken from that. The Council's new Equality and Diversity Strategy will underpin our proposed approach.

- *Supporting our colleagues in the NHS.* Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the NHS who are now in the process of trying to catch up on other work that has

been delayed. There has also been a significant impact on staff. The long term impacts on the NHS are still not clear. The Council will continue to work with the NHS to support its own recovery planning.

- *Seeking to maintain the benefits of health and social care integration.* Whilst the Pandemic has brought challenges it has also demonstrated the art of the possible. The most obvious example is perhaps the discharge of patients from hospital into the community. Over the past year Delayed Transfers of Care have disappeared as the resources have been found to move people out of hospital very quickly. Digitisation and virtual working has also brought many benefits. There is a desire to hold onto these achievements and it is hoped that the funding can be found to achieve this. Much of this work will be taken forward through the Berkshire West Integrated Care Partnership.

- *Promoting good mental health and wellbeing.* This has been a major issue over the past year with clear evidence of increased referrals both for adults and children and young people. The negative impacts of Lockdown has been widely commented on but it is also important to consider the impact created by unemployment and in some cases by having to manage grief. Funding for programmes to support mental health and emotional wellbeing have already been put in place but it is widely recognised that longer term support will be needed.

- *Supporting Adult Social Care.* Adult social care has been adversely affected by the Pandemic in many ways, most notably the residential sector. There is still more to do to ensure that those dependent on adult social care get the support they need but there are also a number of concerns regarding the state of the residential care market both now and into the future.

- *Promoting active lifestyles* – The Pandemic, and the Lockdown in particular, have brought challenges and opportunities in terms of physical activity. The Government has also responded with a move towards promoting active travel with the focus in particular on walking and cycling. Much of West Berkshire is designated as an Area of Outstanding Beauty. Funding has already been provided to support increased activity in our parks and this Strategy seeks to promote this even further recognising the benefits it can bring to both personal physical and mental health as well as wider environmental benefits which are touched on later.

2) **Ensuring economic recovery and renewal, with a focus on those who have lost their jobs, notably the young, women and the disadvantaged; supporting those sectors most impacted by Covid-19; and ensuring we continue the journey of repurposing our Town Centres for the future.**

5.4   The Council has recently refreshed its Economic Development Strategy (2019-2036) to take into account the impacts of Covid-19. The Strategy embraces both existing medium and long term commitments set before Covid-19 and more recent

objectives that are seen as important in the context of recovery and renewal. Six themes have been identified which in the main reflect that revised Strategy:

- *Increasing our efforts to empower everyone to enter the workforce.* This is an existing priority within the Council Strategy 2019-2023. The Council recognises that West Berkshire has notable underemployment in some of the most vulnerable groups. Given the earlier comments regarding the inequality gap this underemployment is likely to have been exacerbated through the Pandemic. This Strategy recognises that more needs to be done and that additional funding and resources will be needed to address this imbalance.

- *Putting in place employment support for the newly unemployed and underemployed.* Reference has already been made to the young, women and vulnerable groups being particularly vulnerable to the economic impact of Covid-19. The Council has responded by acting as a sponsor for the Government's Kickstart Scheme, subscribing to Berkshire Opportunities and continuing to progress its own Apprenticeship Strategy that includes work with partners. The Economic Development Board will continue to keep this work under review whilst at the same time working with the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (TVBLEP) to determine what further opportunities can be developed.

- *Supporting businesses that have been affected by Covid-19 to reopen and trade resiliently.* The Council has worked quickly to administer a wide range of Business Support Grants that have been provided by the Government. The Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) will continue to run until the end of March 2022 and the Council will also now roll out the new Restart Grant to ensure that this is effectively utilised to support local businesses. The Council will also continue to support the implementation of the national Routemap and will respond, where appropriate, to requests for further assistance and will seek to respond proactively to any further unforeseen Covid-19 developments.

- *Reshaping our Town Centres.* There is growing evidence that Town Centres could be particularly badly affected by the fallout from the Pandemic. Prior to Covid-19 the retail sector had been under prolonged pressure. A further continuation towards e-commerce and more working from home will create further pressures. The Council has already responded to this by commissioning a master planning exercise in Newbury and financial commitments have also been made to supporting work in Thatcham and Hungerford. The expectation is that these will be followed through with longer term commitments to bring about renewal through a variety of regeneration schemes.

- *Promoting digital infrastructure focusing on 'Full Fibre' and 5G coverage and help grow digital skills.* Information and communications technology has played a fundamental role in supporting both the economy and wider social infrastructure of the District during the Pandemic. The Council has joined forces with partners in Berkshire to produce a new Digital Investment Strategy. This is focused on installing full fibre across the County, promoting 5G and seeking to

fill in gaps in the existing 4G coverage. The Pandemic has only increased the urgency that needs to be given to this work.

- *Reviewing whether the Council, with its Partners, should seek to invest more in tourism if there is a change in travel patterns.* Over the past decade the Council has disinvested in local tourism. It is one of a number of areas that were deemed to be a lower priority when financial savings had to be made. The degree to which Covid-19 will create a change in travel patterns is still unclear but if there is to be an increase in 'staycations' then the District's attractive environment may provide an opportunity to create further economic growth.

- *Supporting residents to develop and utilise their digital skills.* The Pandemic has accelerated a move towards home working and the digitisation of services in the public, private and voluntary sectors. Although the majority of West Berkshire residents have the digital skills required to work from home or access the services they need online, with statistics suggesting that around a third of the population was able to work remotely during the Pandemic, there still remains a large group who do not have either the skills to do so or the equipment to use even if they did. As many employers and service providers look to rationalise their estates and make long term plans for increased levels of remote working, we must ensure all residents of all generations have the opportunity to access employment and other opportunities which require digital skills.

3) Supporting our children and young people and our schools with a focus on the most vulnerable

5.5 The closure of schools during most of the Lockdowns has understandably had a major impact not only on the education of pupils but also on their social and emotional development. A range of measures have already been put in place to try and help address this but there is no doubt that medium and even long term support will also be required. The Council's approach will be particularly focused around the most vulnerable pupils where the impact is thought to have been most pronounced.

5.6 Financially, the Early Years sector has been particularly badly hit and again measures have been taken to provide support. It will be necessary to monitor how the sector responds coming out of the Pandemic.

5.7 There have however been positive impacts and opportunities for Renewal going forward. These include further remote learning and more inter school collaboration. Seven specific themes have been identified:

- *Ensuring that programmes and support are put in place so that pupils of all ages are able to catch up on the time lost during the Covid-19 Lockdowns.* It is proposed that this is primarily achieved through a range of reading and tutorial programmes.

- *Closing what may well have become a greater education attainment gap.* This will be taken forward through progressing the Disadvantaged Strategy.

- *Improving the transition experience –* from primary to secondary schools. This will be supported through holiday programmes and a specially commissioned transition project.

- *Addressing increased mental health and emotional wellbeing concerns amongst children and young people.* This will be implemented through the deployment of additional staffing resources and new programmes.

- *Responding to an increased demand on our services for support, notably for more vulnerable children.* This will require further assessment as the Lockdown is relaxed but the response is likely to involve deploying additional resources to where they are most needed.

- *Supporting a fragile Early Years sector.* A range of measures are proposed here including potential financial support.

- *Embracing new technology and the opportunities for remote and shared learning.* The focus here is on a range of family based projects but also on ensuring the required security and safeguards are put in place.

4) **Taking the opportunity to work with our local communities to accelerate delivery of our environmental objectives**

5.8 The Pandemic has led to a range of behavioural changes, many enforced, some arguably voluntary. Travel has been significantly affected as many residents have been forced to stay at home during Lockdown. This has had a resulting positive impact on air quality. At the same time Lockdown would appear to have resulted in a greater appreciation of the countryside and wider environment. The degree to which the Pandemic has created a greater impetus around Climate Change is perhaps less clear but three specific themes are picked up under this Priority which are further reflected in Appendix 2.

- *Greater promotion of Active Travel.* As mentioned earlier the Government has already provided the Council with funding to support active travel through an Active Travel Grant. The focus is on promoting cycling and walking as a mode of travel. The Council already supports active travel through its own capital funding and it is proposed that Active Travel is now developed further through the delivery of the Council's Environment Strategy and the preparation of the forthcoming Local Transport Plan 2.

- *Promoting sustainable forms of transport.* Public transport is a key focus within this theme. Many of West Berkshire's bus routes are already subsidised by the Council and providers have continued to be supported financially during the Pandemic. The Government has also recently announced funding aimed at attracting people back into using public transport and encouraging cleaner vehicles. The Council has also recently agreed its Ultra Low Emission Vehicle (ULEV) Strategy and an increased focus will be put on promoting and supporting

the use of non-hydrocarbon fuelled vehicles.

- *Investing more in our parks, open spaces and public rights of way.* This theme aligns closely with the promotion of physical activity. The aim here is to seek to increase the attractiveness of our parks and open spaces and also to more actively promote our public rights of way through the introduction of designated trails. The provision of more dog bins is another issue that will need to be considered.

5)   Enhancing our communications and community engagement

5.9   Prior to Covid-19 the Council recognised that it needed to do more to enhance its communication and engagement with its local communities. The Local Government Association reflected this in its recommendations as part of the Council's second Corporate Peer Challenge in November 2019. The Pandemic has provided the opportunity to implement these recommendations - and more, and with the benefit of additional funding we have now greatly expanded the reach of our communication activities.

5.10   The Pandemic has also brought a renewed sense of community spirit. Some 90 community groups have emerged to support those affected in some way by Covid-19 and the Council also established a Community Support Hub to coordinate its own community response to the Covid-19 challenge.

5.11   Over the past year the Council has prepared a Communications and Engagement Strategy and within that a community engagement programme. The Council has also sought to create the new Communities and Wellbeing Department over the same period to ensure that there is sufficient focus and ambition on this important area. Appendix 2 contains a summary of what is within the Communications and Engagement Strategy recognising that the Pandemic has been the catalyst for much of what lies within it:

- *Developing and strengthening even further our relationships with local partners and those at a sub-regional level reflecting on the good collaborative work that has been achieved through the Pandemic.* This will involve seeking to take a system based approach to recovery. This has already begun to emerge. Economic recovery is being taken forward in part at a County level with the assistance of the TVLEP. Recovery work is also being taken forward with Health partners through the Integrated Care Partnership (ICP).

- *Working to help build a more sustainable voluntary, community and social enterprise sector.* This will involve the establishment of new community alliance and the commissioning of a number of advocacy organisations.

- *Sustain the dynamic relationships with community groups and local councils that have emerged during the Pandemic.* This is an ongoing area of work that involves the creation of a Community Engagement and Enablement Framework.

- *Capture what was achieved by the creation of the Community Support Hub and take that learning into future work.* This work will follow later in 2021.

- *Becoming better at informing our local communities about what we are doing and about the issues that are relevant to them.* Much of this work has already been completed through implementation of the Communication and Engagement Strategy although there is some further work to be done around enhancing the Council's presence on social media.

- *Enhancing our approach to how we involve residents, businesses and local communities in what we are doing.* This work is less advanced and will again involve the further development of social media.

6) Improving our customers' experience of us with an enhanced efficiency and openness in how we work and share information

5.12 Whilst the Council has kept its Offices open throughout the Pandemic there have been relatively few visitors. Lockdown rules have driven that but that does not take away from the fact that the Council has managed to continue much of its business very effectively without the need to have face to face contact. The proliferation of Zoom and Teams meetings highlight the change, but also potentially a longer term trend towards interacting virtually and in doing so saving time and potential carbon production.

5.13 That said not all interaction can or should be done virtually. For an Organisation that has a particular focus on the most vulnerable, and a Recovery and Renewal Strategy that recognises that it is often these groups that have been most adversely effected by the Pandemic, it is important that we do not close the door to other means of communication that some will find easier to manage. Social interaction is vital for human health and wellbeing and the Council has no desire to gain a reputation for being remote and mechanistic.

5.14 This is an area of work that is currently relatively undeveloped. The Council has sought to maintain communication channels during the Pandemic and has successfully enabled remote working for its staff but quite what the Council aspires to in the future is not yet clear. This Strategy will help drive this forward at greater pace.

- *Responding to the changing needs of our customers in a post Covid-19 world.* Further work is required but the focus here will be on transforming the Council's work to ensure that customers who want it are able to access the Council's digitally enabled services 24/7 and engage with the Council's staff virtually, in addition to face to face contact where required.

- *Responding to an increasing demand to work virtually and in a more digitally enabled world.* As above but with the wider application to how we work with communities and partners in a similar way.

7) Seizing the positives from the Pandemic but not forgetting those we have lost; those whose lives will be forever changed; and those who have

supported our local communities during the Pandemic, including our own staff.

This section is something of a catch all. It seeks to bring together important activities that fall outside of the other six priorities. It includes proposals to remember those in West Berkshire who have been lost to the Pandemic and also embraces a major piece of work that is underway within the Council to change the way we work as an organisation.

- *Take the opportunity to embed the positive aspects of the working practices that we have had to be put in place during the Covid-19 Pandemic.* As mentioned earlier the Council has introduced new working practices during the Pandemic as the vast majority of staff have had to work from home and engage remotely. The Council has now initiated a project entitled Timelord 2 that seeks to take the learning from the Pandemic and translate it into a set of permanent new working practices.

- *Using Outcome Based Budgeting to help direct resources to support Recovery and Renewal priorities.* The Council will be using the Outcomes Based Budgeting to support the development of it's 2022/23 Budget and will ensure that it's recovery and renewal priorities are reflected in that. This will be in addition to other direct sources of Council and Government recovery funding. Funding has already been provided to support activities such as enhancing public rights of way. Financial support for enhancing the Council's engagement work including CIL and further capital schemes will also be considered.

- *Remembering those we have lost, and those whose lives have been adversely impacted, by the Pandemic.* A special project entitled 'A Blossom in to Spring' is proposed to mark the 235 West Berkshire residents who have died as a result of Covid-19. In addition to this the Council also proposes to mark the start of the first Lockdown in the spring of 2020 on an annual basis.

6. **Conclusions**

6.1   The Country and the Council have swung between periods of response and recovery over the past 12 months or so as we have sought to manage the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic. The first Recovery Strategy was written and approved at a time when it appeared we were moving into a period of prolonged recovery. This proved short lived and response has now been the theme since last autumn. Once again as we move into spring 2021 it appears recovery is coming to the fore and we have therefore sought to update our Strategy.

6.2   Whilst the Council may have had to return to response during the autumn of 2020 a great deal of recovery work has been undertaken. Some of this has been strategic. The Council's Economic Development Strategy has been written and a new Communications and Engagement Strategy has been approved. Both are a response, at least in part, to the Pandemic. The Council's Recovery Group has also instigated and funded a range of new initiatives and programmes to assist with recovery work and many of these are referenced in this updated Strategy.

6.3   This new Recovery and Renewal Strategy has sought to reflect on three issues:

- The progress with recovery work that we have already made over the course of the past year.
- The learning that we have taken with regard to the impacts of Covid-19 on our local communities and the things that are important to them.
- The need to focus our activities on what will be most impactful, mindful that our own capacity is limited.

6.4   This updated Strategy also coincides with the refresh of our Council Strategy (2019-2023). We have sought to align both so that the key elements of our Covid-19 recovery and renewal are built into the Council Strategy Refresh.

6.5   No one yet knows how the Pandemic will develop from this point. It is however already clear what some of the main impacts have already been and also some of the opportunities that the Pandemic might present. It is important that we do not delay in implementing our proposed actions otherwise challenges will be left unresolved and opportunities for beneficial change lost. It may well be that we will need to come back once more to this Strategy in the months ahead. The Pandemic is not over but we recognise that we must continue to respond to the challenges that we face whilst also recognising that the road to recovery and renewal will be a long and potentially uncertain one.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – What are we recovering from and what are we seeking to renew?

Appendix 2 – Recovery and Renewal Strategy 2021 Update – Delivery Plan

What are we recovering from and what are we seeking to renew?

Health and other social impacts

Overview

- West Berkshire had 6,489 Covid-19 cases as at 16th May 2021. This places West Berkshire in the lowest quartile compared with the other 152 upper tier local authorities in England.

- There were 252 deaths in West Berkshire to 16th May 2021. This is a rate of 156.5 deaths per 100,000 population in West Berkshire compared to a rate of 230.7 nationally and 226 regionally.

- West Berkshire had 7,225 shielded patients (on 26th February 2021), 4.6% of the population (compared to 6.1% for SE region and 6.8% for England)

- It is estimated that nationally between 6.7% and 14.7% of infected people have Long Covid-19 symptoms after 12 weeks, the median duration of symptoms is around 40 days.

- West Berkshire is ranked 5th on the national Health Index suggesting strong resilience in terms of population health.

- From a health perspective Covid-19 has had a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups, including older people, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and those living in deprived areas. This will have potentially increased the inequality gap in West Berkshire even further.

- The longer term health impacts of Covid-19 are as yet unclear but delayed medical treatment is set to increase the incidence of long term illness and mortality. Lockdown has had an impact on mental health of many, including children and young people. The longer term impacts of this are as yet unclear.

- Mental health referrals have increased during the Pandemic.

- A range of services have not been able to be provided during the Lockdown largely because the NHS has been focused on Covid-19 or because Lockdown has prevented consultations and meetings taking place. Health visiting and sexual health services are but two examples. In some instances some groups may have found it more difficult to remain in treatment during the Pandemic.

- Safeguarding, particularly for the under 5s, has been a concern during the Pandemic.

- Underlying illnesses e.g. hearing and vision problems may not have been picked up.

- The longer term impact on the residential care sector is not yet known. Demand is currently suppressed. This will need to be considered alongside the existing work regarding the Council's future place in the residential care market.

- Visiting arrangements in Care Homes need to be carefully considered moving forward as do the arrangements for reopening Resource Centres.

- Lockdown is also likely to have led to an increase in unhealthy behaviours such as physical inactivity, an increase in alcohol consumption and poor diet.

- The Pandemic has brought about a notable increase in community resilience and spirit. Individuals and communities have demonstrated a desire to go the extra mile. 90 local community groups have emerged during the Pandemic.

- Crime rates have fallen during the Pandemic. This replicates an underlying trend in crime reduction that has been seen for a number of years. The reduction has been notably greater in West Berkshire than elsewhere.

- Local communities have generally been compliant in adhering to Covid-19 restrictions.

- Vaccine immunisation has been high in West Berkshire to date but it is likely to be lower in some ethnic groups and potentially amongst younger people.

- The national increase in domestic abuse during the Pandemic has been less evident locally.

- Lockdown has had a major impact on education. Learning has moved online but it is widely accepted that pupils have fallen behind. The wider longer term health and social impacts on children and young people are not fully understood but personal, social and emotional development is thought to have been particularly badly affected.

- Achievement rates in reading and maths are thought to have reduced and speech, language and communication development are also thought to have been particularly badly impacted.

- Anxiety has been created around examination disruption and also the impact of parental stress.

- Levels of social development are thought to be lower especially amongst poorer children highlighting again the particular impact the Pandemic has had on potentially more vulnerable children including children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

- The impact of bereavement trauma during the Pandemic is not fully understood.

- The Early Years sector has been particularly badly impacted financially during the Pandemic raising concerns about long term financial viability.

- Lockdown has catalysed a further increase in e commerce and 'all things digital'. Some of this shift will undoubtedly stick going forward and create new patterns in how residents live their lives.

- The Government's 'Everyone In' programme has led to a notable reduction in rough sleeping. In January there were 9 individuals sleeping rough locally.

- The longer term generational impact of Covid-19 and its impact on children and young people are not fully understood yet. There are feelings of resentfulness amongst the younger generation regarding missed life events and opportunities.

- The degree to which any behavioural change has become embedded is also unclear.

Implications

- A potentially widening inequality gap must be seen as a major concern given it was already an issue pre Covid-19. More will need to be done and the issue will need to be tackled in a holistic manner.

- NHS Recovery may have a 'knock on' impact on local government most notably Adult Social Care and the provision of preventative services.

- Holding onto some of the positives in terms of the integration of health and social care services are likely to come at a cost with little clarity yet as to whether that funding will be forthcoming.

- There are a range of impacts regarding children and young people that will need to be considered. These include catching up on learning, addressing what is likely to have become an increased attainment gap, addressing mental health and wellbeing issues, supporting a fragile Early Years sector and on a positive footing embracing the opportunities that technology and shared learning have brought through the Pandemic.

- More extensive and longer term mental health and wellbeing programmes are likely to be needed. There is also an opportunity to build on promoting greater social interaction through the planned work on community engagement.

- There is an opportunity to harness and promote an increased interest in more active lifestyles.

- There is a real opportunity to consolidate on the community spirit that has emerged and thereby enhance engagement further.

- The digital world is now truly here. Expectations have changed as a result of the Pandemic and some of these are likely to become norms in the post Covid-19 world. The Council will need to adapt to meet these expectations.

- Partnership working has been enhanced as a result of the challenges that Covid-19 has brought. This is evident in a number of areas e.g. hospital discharges, NEETS etc. Can this be built on?

- Time and space needs to be set aside to reflect and remember what local communities have gone through over the past year – and also to celebrate what is hoped will be a brighter future.

Economic Impacts

Overview

- The Government now expects GDP to reach pre Covid-19 GDP levels by the middle of 2022. The national economy is expected to be 3% smaller in five years' time than it would have been had the Pandemic not occurred.

- The most impacted sectors are those dependent on social consumption (e.g. hospitality and leisure) in addition to wholesale and retail. These are not overly dominant in the West Berkshire economy.

- The sectors most adversely affected tend to be dominated by young workers and females who are often unable to work from home.

- That said West Berkshire has a large proportion of industries where there is a high propensity to be able to work from home.

- There has been a significant rise in the past year in vacancies which are seeking staff to work remotely.

- 4,900 jobs in West Berkshire have been furloughed (6% of all jobs).

- 3,755 people are claiming unemployment benefit in West Berkshire (March 2021). The number has tripled in a year although the qualifying criteria have been broadened.

- It is worth reflecting on pre Covid-19 forecast trends which will remain relevant in recovery planning alongside predictions relating to the current recession:

  o Locally labour supply will continue to fall as the population ages rapidly (this started in 2018). This is at odds with other areas where the workforce is set to increase.

  o Future forecast growth sectors have been less impacted by Covid-19.

- o Growth is expected in employees – self-employment is forecast to remain static. Part time employment is expected to grow more rapidly than full time.

- o Job density (number of jobs per economically active person) remains very high in West Berks (1.17 compared to 0.88 for the South-East and 0.87 nationally). Looking ahead comparatively strong demand and a shrinking workforce would see this ratio increase further. Reduced in migration from Europe and the impact of increased remote working also need to be considered.

- o Despite known challenges in terms of vulnerable groups being able to access the labour market, West Berkshire's NEET figures in January 2021 were very positive.

- o West Berkshire's working population remains very highly qualified.

Implications

- Recession will reduce consumer spend and is likely to have an impact on public finances.

- West Berkshire has generally proved fairly resilient economically during the Pandemic as it has during earlier economic shocks. This comparatively positive position would seem set to remain moving forward.

- Some sectors such as retail are likely to decline further in terms of employment. Others such as hospitality may recover more quickly.

- There is a need to rethink the District's town centres as destinations. They have a high proportion of sectors that have been vulnerable during Covid-19, are sensitive to the rapid growth in e-commerce and are also vulnerable to changing work patterns which may well see more 'office workers' working from home.

- The forecast shift out of major urban centres such as London to suburban or more rural areas such as West Berkshire could lead to an increase in housing demand and pressure on house prices.

- Reskilling, particularly for badly impacted sectors may be important. Job support will need to focus on younger age groups and women as well as those groups that are traditionally underrepresented in the local workforce.

- Demand for office accommodation may shrink as new working patterns potentially form. Future regeneration plans will need to reflect this if it materialises.

- Digital investment seems set to become an even more important driver.

Environmental Impacts

Overview

- At a global level the negative impacts of the Pandemic are seen to be an increased use of single use plastics and lower oil prices. Positive influences, at least in the short term, are reduced emissions and improved air quality. The latter could become more lasting if work locations and there are widespread changes in human behaviour.

- There may be longer impacts on international trade and travel if strategies are introduced to reduce exposure to Pandemic risks.

- Locally, travel has been impacted by the Lockdown (April 2020 saw reductions between 59% and 73%, then 7% - 26% during September and reduced again to between 11% and 55% in December compared to previous year). Fewer journeys have led to reduced congestion. At the same time there has been a move towards more active forms of travel most notably cycling and walking.

- There is a sense that there is now a greater appreciation of the environment.

- As with the economic impacts it is worth reflecting on those wider trends / decisions that were in place prior to Covid-19 and which will have an influence on recovery and renewal planning:

  o Nationally, legally binding targets to reduce emissions by 2030 noting that West Berkshire has committed to being 'Carbon Zero' by the same date; reducing water abstraction and leakage by 2025; enhancing biodiversity with long term targets for tree planting and woodland cover; better management of environmental risks e.g. flooding; better natural resource management namely soils, timber fish and food; enhancing the natural environment; mitigating and adapting to climate change; and, minimising waste, managing exposure to chemicals.

  o On November 18th the Prime Minister set out a ten point plan for a green industrial revolution. This included the promotion of greener forms of energy, greener homes and buildings, carbon capture, protecting the natural environment, promoting innovation and providing financial support. The Council's Environment Strategy reflects much of this.

Implications

- The Council has an Environment Strategy Delivery Plan and this will be used as the vehicle to enshrine any recovery and renewal targets emanating from Covid-19. Areas where it would appear there is a notable opportunity to do more are:

  o The promotion of community engagement since much of what the Council is seeking to deliver can only be done with local commmunties.

- Promotion of active travel which could be further supported by residents choosing to travel less or in a different way.

- An even greater opportunity to promote the expansion of EV charging points.

- Encouraging customers back to using public transport.

- Better promotion and use of our open spaces for leisure activities.

- Enhanced tree planting and other initiatives aimed at enhancing biodiversity and responding to a greater appreciation of the countryside and local environment. This could be particularly positive with the younger generations.

- Longer term opportunities in this area will be driven by the degree to which the Pandemic has created long lasting behaviour change. This is not yet clear.

- If traditional road travel is going to decline then should resources be diverted away from road maintenance into supporting the themes in the Environment Strategy?

- If 'Staycations' are going to become more popular should the Council consider investing more in tourism promotion?

Organisational Impacts

Overview

- As this Recovery and Renewal Plan is being written there is an emerging expectation that Local Government is set to play a prominent role in supporting the national Covid-19 response going forward. It has been suggested that councils are likely to take on responsibilities for Test and Trace, outbreak management, surge testing, community support and even vaccinations. If additional responsibilities are allocated then these will need to be managed alongside recovery and renewal expectations

- The country is currently experiencing an economic recession driven by Covid-19. This will have an adverse impact on the community but also potentially on the Council in terms of both future Government funding and the Council's own income levels. Covid-19 may well have a more direct impact on Council income in terms of town centre parking.

- Covid-19 recovery and renewal provides an opportunity for the Council to lead by example in the measures it takes following the Pandemic.

- The ability to do a lot more digitally has transformed the way that the Council works both internally and with its customers. This will undoubtedly be one of the most lasting areas of renewal post Covid-19. There are a range of issues to consider in this regard:

  - Progressing new channels of communication such as chat bots

- o Continuing to engage more residents in Council meetings through remote access.
- o Meetings and surgeries all being held on line. This could be extended to the resolution of service queries, complaints etc. That said an understanding needs to be reached as to what is best done online and what is better done face to face.

- o Moving further away from paper and written recording.

- o Opportunities to engage the traditionally 'hard to reach' through more innovative digital methods.

- o With a greater emphasis on digital working there is a fresh opportunity to enhance our capture of data and using it to better understand our customers' needs in the planning of services.

- o Staff training becoming increasingly virtual and extended into areas such as coaching and mentoring.

- o Operating under urgency procedures has enabled much speedier decision making and there is an appetite for looking at whether this could be retained at least in part moving forward.

- New ways of working which are likely to involve more home working on a permanent basis will bring both opportunities and challenges. Opportunities will include being able to recruit from a larger employment pool, improved retention and work life balance, reduced carbon emissions and reduced costs. Challenges include managing remote staff, training, supporting new starters and maintaining a team ethos and support structure.

- There is an expectation that the demand for services may well increase following the Pandemic notably for those areas which are focused on supporting the vulnerable, safeguarding and providing mental health and wellbeing services.

- The Pandemic has now been with us for over a year. The vast majority of Council staff have continued to work during this time sometimes in difficult circumstances. Others have had to directly support the Covid-19 response. Fatigue is now a noticeable problem and this needs to be recognised in setting an appropriate pace for any Recovery and Renewal Programme.

- The long term impact of Covid-19 on staff recruitment most notably in Adult Social Care is as yet unclear. In the NHS there is a fear that there may be a significant exit of staff post Covid-19 particularly from those who came into the country to work.

Implications

- Recovery and renewal need to be set at an appropriate pace. Some staff are very tired and the 'day job' has not gone away. Expectations need to be managed particularly if coming out of Lockdown demand for services increases in some areas.

- This will become even more important if local government is given on going responsibilities for Covid-19 management.
- The Council needs to 'lead by example' thereby further strengthening its community leadership role through the Pandemic.

- There are significant opportunities to enhance our own efficiency and our relationship with customers through the more rapid enablement of ICT. Capacity and perhaps capability are likely to be the main restraints here. A comprehensive training programme will be essential.

- Whilst there is great potential in the enablement of further ICT we need to reach an understanding as to what is best done virtually and what should be done through face to face contact.

- New approaches to working are there to be realised and could bring a wide range of potential benefits. An early start has been made on this with Timelord 2.

Recovery and Renewal Strategy 2021 Update – Delivery Plan

Priority 1 - Recovering West Berkshire's health and social wellbeing to ensure we remain one of the healthiest places in the country, whilst at the same time doing more to address health inequalities.	
Theme	*Actions*
1. Closing the inequality gap.	Ensure that our Equality and Diversity Strategy is prepared with key partners and effectively consulted on to ensure it addresses post Covid-19 issues - and that it is championed within the Council. Address these concerns through the upcoming Equalities and Diversity Strategy basing actions on what evidence is available. There will need to be an emphasis on: • Improving the collection of ethnicity and other protected characteristics data. • Developing 'culturally competent' programmes for engagement and service delivery. • Measuring the impact of interventions and learning from what that tells us. • From our learning create actions that can be delivered at a local level to reduce inequalities. Ensure that there is meaningful consultation on the strategy; that it is co-produced and that it clearly demonstrates the Council as being a 'champion of equality'. Reinforcing the Council's role as a placemaker buy using our own Establishment to influence change e.g. positive hiring practices, offering work opportunities, influencing appropriately in our role as a major employer in the District and byensuring we bring social value into our policy making. *(Strategy and Governance to lead – All Departments)*

Theme	Actions
1. Closing the inequality gap.	Address the inequality gap through implementing new healthy planning considerations and procedures, such as health impact assessments, in West Berkshire developments. The built environment is a wider determinant of health and COVID-19 has exemplified to what extent people's physical living conditions play a part in determining health across the life course. Public Health will work with all relevant departments and Berkshire West CCG to ensure that health is at the forefront of new designs as part of the effort to close the inequalities gap. *(Communities & Wellbeing)*
2. Supporting our colleagues in the NHS.	NHS Recovery priorities are based around continuing to support the Covid-19 response, returning to BAU as soon as possible, and ensuring that staff are supported and the required staffing resources are in place. The Council will continue to work with Health colleagues through the Integrated Care Partnership (BW ICP) to support this. *(Berkshire West Integrated Care Partnership)* Seek to continue the very positive improvements that have been seen in hospital discharge times during the Pandemic. This will be subject to sufficient funding coming forward. *(Adult Social Care)* Place an increased focus on prevention to help reduce the demand on the NHS. *(Communities & Wellbeing)*
3. Seeking to maintain the benefits of health and social care integration.	The BW ICP is currently reviewing its flagship priorities for 2021/22 and these will include a number of programmes which will seek to further develop health and social care integration both at a Place (Berkshire West) and Locality (West Berkshire) level. *(BW ICP)*
4. Promoting good mental health and wellbeing.	A £200k programme has already been put in place to cover additional mental health support co funded with Greenham Trust.

Theme	Actions
4. Promoting good mental health and wellbeing.	Carry out an exercise with partners to map mental health needs across West Berkshire post Covid -19. The BOB ICS is undertaking a review of CAMHS services across the wider area. *(Communities and Wellbeing; Children and Family Services; Adult Social Care; BW ICP)* Ensure that arrangements are in place to raise the profile of mental health services to effectively manage the increase in mental health and wellbeing in rough sleepers and homelessness. *(Development & Planning)* Carry out an exercise with parnters to map mental health needs across West Berkshire post Covid-19. The BOB ICS is undertaking a review of CAMHS services across the wider area. *(Communities & Wellbeing)* Promoting positive mental health as well as mental health services for those that need it. *(Communities & Wellbeing)*
5. Supporting Adult Social Care.	Ensure that visiting arrangements are reviewed and updated as required. Ensuring the Resource Centres open as soon as they are able. Continue to monitor the residential care market and our position within it. Support initiatives aimed at improving outdoor spaces in our 'in house' care homes. Ensure that certain key functions e.g. the review of care packages are brought back to 'business as usual' as soon as possible. *(Adult Social Care)*
6. Promoting active lifestyles.	Continue to support the roll out of 'Berkshire West Can'. *(Berkshire West Integrated Care Partnership)*

Theme	Actions
6. Promoting active lifestyles.	Establish an ongoing promotional campaign focused on promoting physical activity locally in the context of coming out of Covid-19 including the restart of previously popular programmes e.g. West Berkshire Run Together and West Berkshire Park Run. *(Communities and Wellbeing; Strategy and Governance)* Establish bespoke programmes to support those who have lost mobility during the Pandemic or are potentially vulnerable to low levels of physical activity e.g. older people. Consider promoting on line fitness programmes. Refocus and relaunch the Community Physical Activity Fund in partnership with Greenham Trust with health inequalities and COVID-19 recovery in mind. The fund will give local organisations the opportunity to apply for funding to enable them to develop or enhance a physical activity initiative, and will prioritise those applications that will best serve members of the community most impacted by the Pandemic. *(Communities and Wellbeing)*

Priority 2 - Ensuring economic recovery and renewal, with a focus on those who have lost their jobs, notably the young, women and the disadvantaged; supporting those sectors most impacted by Covid-19; and ensuring we continue the journey of repurposing out Town Centres for the future.

Theme	Actions
1. Increasing our efforts to empower everyone to enter the workplace.	Target skills development and employment guidance at women, young people and other groups impacted by the Covid-19 Pandemic. *(Planning and Development : Education)* Reinforcing the Council's role as a placemaker buy using our own Establishment to influence change e.g. positive hiring practices, offering work opportunities, influencing appropriately in our role as a major employer in the District and ensuring we bring social value into our policy making. *(Strategy & Governance)* Promote local government more effectively as a career path for local residents *(Strategy and Governance: All Departments)*

Theme	Actions
1. Increasing our efforts to empower everyone to enter the workplace.	Adopt a Social Value Policy to maximise the use of public money in public contracts and make positive changes for the good of the District as a whole by creating jobs for local people, supporting young people into apprenticeships, using local suppliers, and supporting a local supply chain and investing in SME businesses. The Policy will support opportunities to innovate and generate environmental benefits in such areas as the delivery of the new Environment Strategy 2020- 2030. *(Commissioning)* Help residents to develop their digital skills at every stage and to facilitate access to equipment among communities where there is deprivation, including through out community hubs such as libraries. *(Strategy & Governance)*
2. Putting in place employment support for the newly unemployed and underemployed.	Promote Berkshire Opportunities as a first port of call for the recently unemployed. Through the Jobcentre, identify and refer young people to the Kickstart Scheme, delivering this message through other Council services. Utilise the Kickstart scheme to create temporary roles at the Council and in schools. Work with the Local Enterprise Partnership to influence employers to offer value- added jobs to a wider range of employers. *(Planning and Development)*
3. Supporting businesses that have been affected by Covid-19 to reopen and trade resiliently.	Continue to administer Business Support Grants including the ARG Support businesses to adapt and diversify by referring them to the Berkshire Business Growth Hub for bespoke advice. *(Finance and Property : Planning and Development)* Redesign and relaunch a Mental Health First Aid initiative for local businesses, so that they may reopen with staff health and wellbeing at the forefront of their operations. *(Communities and Wellbeing)*

Theme	Actions
4 Reshaping our Town Centres.	Through the Berkshire Place Making Board identify projects which will contribute to sustainable, inclusive growth and seek funding for them from Government through the Levelling Up Fund and similar revenue streams. The redevelopment of the Newbury Lido has been identified as the first project to be put forward to Government.
	We will support our High Streets across the District to deliver the new uses that are needed by local residents and businesses.
	Use the Government's Welcome Back Fund and Council funded Welcome Back business grants to drive footfall in high streets and town centres, including Newbury, Thatcham, Hungerford and others. Develop 'Shop Local' branding and marketing activity to encourage more ethical, impactful shopping and purchase of services.
	Seek funding for capital spend arising from masterplanning for Newbury, Thatcham, Hungerford and other West Berkshire towns in order to improve the public realm and the spaces available to residents and businesses.
	(Development and Planning; Environment)
	Develop formalised working relationships between Planning and Public Health, so that the health needs of the West Berkshire population are considered in the reshaping of our town centres.
	(Development and Planning, Communities and Wellbeing)
5. Promoting digital infrastructure focusing on 'full fibre' and 5G coverage and help grow digital skills.	Seek to facilitate and fund projects that enable the provision of full fibre and 5G across Berkshire and West Berkshire.
	(Berkshire Digital Infrastructure Group)
	Partnering with schools, and our teams involved with schools, to deliver targeted digital skills training such as coding – initially through online classes.
	Prioritise digital skills within opportunities offered by the Council; including apprenticeships, work experience and potential Kickstarter roles.

	Theme	Actions
5	Promoting digital infrastructure focusing on 'full fibre' and 5G coverage and help grow digital skills.	We will support the LEP's proposed Digital Skills Partnership to boost the availability of vital skills locally. *(ICT; Planning and Development; Strategy and Governance; Education; Berkshire Digital Infrastructure Group)*
6	Reviewing whether the Council, with its Partners, should seek to encourage further rural diversification through investing more in tourism if there is a sustained change in holiday travel patterns.	Will require a review of potential investment opportunities if it becomes clear that over the medium term there has been a move towards domestic holidays. *(Planning and Development)*
7	Support the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the district to recover from financial hardship and poverty.	Adopt a financial inclusion policy to support local vulnerable and disadvantaged groups such as homeless, experiencing financial hardship and poverty due to the impact of Covid 19. The policy will enable issues such as, loss of income through furlough, job losses and affordability to be minimised and contribute towards sustainable communities. *(Strategy & Governance; Finance & Property)*

Priority 3 – Supporting our children and young people and our schools with a focus on the most vulnerable.

	Theme	Actions
1.	Ensuring that programmes and support are in place for pupils of all ages and that they are able to catch up on the time lost during the Covid-19 Lockdowns.	A range of programmes are in or being put in place: • Early Reading Year 1 • General Reading Programme (18 schools) • National Tutoring Programme • Full potential (1:1) tuition for any pupil (GT Partnership) • Oracy programme • Mathematics programmes. *(Education)*
2.	Closing what may well have become a greater education attainment gap.	Introduce the Ready to Progress' criteria to schools for mathematics. Ensure the curriculum is highly ambitious for all by: • Continuing to raise the profile of subsidised subject leader training • Flying visits to schools

		• Staff meetings to schools.

Theme		*Actions*
2.	Closing what may well have become a greater education attainment gap.	Widen career choices for disadvantaged pupils by ensuring PP champions in secondary schools engage through network meetings. *(Education)*
3.	Improving the transition experience.	Holiday and activities and food programme will include secondary involvement and complete some transition work. Schools transition project. Year 6 / 7 schools' transition project – voluntary project between schools to share outcomes of any assessments taken. *(Education)*
4.	Addressing increased mental health and emotional wellbeing concerns amongst children and young people.	A range of programmes are in or being put in place: • Extra Primary Mental Health worker in EHA (potential extension for 2 years). • Deliver PPEP Care Training • Emotionally Based School Avoiders (EBSA) support (bid has already gone to Schools Forum). • Potential early intervention from Ed Psychs (screening for one year). • Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) being made available for parents to improve parent wellbeing and child behaviour intervention increases parenting sensitivity. • Consider subsidising training for ELSAs (Emotional Literacy Support Assistants) for Early Years setting to support the wellbeing of pre-schoolers. • Pilot the role of Wellbeing Governors in schools. *(Education)*
5.	Responding to an increased demand on our services for support, notably for more vulnerable children and young people including those Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs).	The following actions are being considered: • Reduce our traded services costs for 1 year to subsidise costs to schools. • Increase the amount of free days provided on SLAs. • Extend Assistant SEN case officer post. • Roll out the Oracy project to schools. • Use assessments and school intelligence to select core schools to receive support • Implement the Phonics Early Reading Strategy. • Pupil premium champions to work in nominated

	schools. Create a Recovery based 'Diminishing the Difference' schedule.
	• Continue to support opportunities for NEET indivduals and invest time in seeking out apprenticeship options with employers.
	(Education)
6. Supporting a fragile Early Years sector.	• Consider providing a central Early Years central training bursary fund.
	• Extend the Imagination Library (book gifting) to specific targeted groups
	• Family Hub work to focus of developing parenting with a focus on socialisation and using outdoor spaces to develop motor skills
	• Consider the recruitment of Family Support Workers OR active play workers to encourage parents and their children to get active, interact and connect and help alleviate anxiety, loneliness and raise mental health resilience.
	(Education)
7. Embracing new technology and the opportunities for remote and shared learning.	Awareness and training for parents.
	Designing projects completed as a family.
	Parental control guidance for devices to keep children safe online.
	(Education)

Priority 4 - Taking the opportunity to accelerate delivery of our environmental objectives	
Theme	*Actions*
1. Greater promotion of Active Travel.	Implement the local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and enclose this within a new post Covid-19 Local Transport Plan.
	Expand the Council's cycle training offering.
	(Environment)
	Promote active travel modes in all relevant planning consultations with a particular focus on active commuter travel.
	Contribute to the LEP's Berkshire Connected Travel Plan.
	(Development and Planning)
	Explore commissioning an active travel behaviour change study, as part of the Capabilities Fund Grant, to research the barriers and facilitators to adults in West Berkshire choosing active modes of travel.

	(Communities and Wellbeing)

Theme	Actions
2. Promoting more sustainable forms of transport.	Seek to find additional resources to implement EV charging at greater pace. *(Environment)* Establish a promotional campaign to encourage people back onto public transport. *(Environment)*

Priority 4 - Taking the opportunity to accelerate delivery of our environmental objectives	
Theme	Actions
3. Investing more in our parks, open spaces and public rights of way.	Implement further initiatives to increase physical activity. Assess what investment may be needed to protect current parks and open spaces in the face of increased demand. *(Environment)*

Priority 5 - Enhancing our communications and our community engagement	
Theme	Action
1. Developing and strengthening even further our relationships with local partners and those at a sub-regional level reflecting on the good collaborative work that has been achieved through the Pandemic.	Establish system level approaches to Recovery e.g. through Integrated Care Partnership, Community Safety Partnership etc. *(Communities and Wellbeing, Strategy and Governance – others?)* Through the Health and Wellbeing Board look to establish a more system based approach to communications and community engagement. *(Communities and Wellbeing, Strategy and Governance)*
2. Working to help build a more sustainable voluntary, community and social enterprise sector.	Conduct engagement to establish and address the needs of the Voluntary and Community Sector Support in West Berkshire. Commission a Diverse Ethnic Communities Advocacy Service to support our ethnically diverse communities in West Berkshire. Create a Community Alliance to bring together community leaders as equal partners to support community capacity building.

	(Communities and Wellbeing)

Theme	Action
3. Sustaining the dynamic relationships with community groups and local councils that have emerged during the Pandemic.	Develop a Community Engagement Framework to strengthen relationships with our local communities – seeking engagement and opportunities to co-produce local solutions. *(Communities and Wellbeing)*
4. Capturing what was achieved by the creation of the Community Support Hub and take that learning into future work – both under emergency scenarios and 'normal' service delivery across the Council.	A specific paper will be produced for discussion later in 2021. *(Communities and Wellbeing)*
5. Becoming better at informing our local communities about what we are doing and about issues that are relevant to them.	The publication of a digital residents newsletter which is already in place. The use of the Gov.Delivery framework to enhance our delivery of information to local communities including the publication of a newsletter to local businesses. The production of a weeknote from the Leader and Chief Executive to local residents. This is already in place. The introduction of 'think pieces' to reflect on the implications of the global on the local emphasis of WBC's role in something wider. Social media – look to further enhance the opportunities provided by social media and to rensure that it is effectively managed. The establishment of an internal Communications Steering Group to enhance the flow of information across the Council and out to the local community. The establishment of a weekly briefing for the local media. *(Strategy and Governance)*
6. Enhancing our approach to how we involve residents, businesses and local communities in what we are doing.	Start using social media to establish more effective means of creating a two way dialogue. *(Strategy and Governance)*

Priority 6 - Improving the customers' experience of us with an enhanced efficiency and openness with an enhanced openness in how we work and share information	
Theme	*Action*
1. Responding to the changing needs of our customers in a post Covid-19 world.	This area of work is significantly less developed and will require further attention of we are to sustain the behaviour changes that have been seen in Lockdown. Key issues to be addressed are: • Digital Democracy is as important as the Digital Strategy – viz one service, many channels. • Should we consider some form of Customer Charter – highlighting the need for two way communication, participation and our responsibilities to each other as we deliver and use local services. • What approach are we going to take to face to face meetings with customers – are we moving to 'virtual by default?' • Do we remove all walk in face to face contact and move to appointments only • What suite of performance indicators do we use to ensure that a more digitally enabled customer experience is delivering what the customer should expect and needs? • What additional resources do we require to make this more efficiency digitally enabled work a reality – and by the same measure what do we need to disinvest from? *(Strategy and Governance)* The Council will create a modern workplace by improving the connectivity of its workforce and by providing better facilities to aid remote working. The Council will provide training to officers and Members to ensure that they are proficient at performing digital transactions. The Council will produce a Customer Charter – two way communication, participation and our responsibilities to each other as we deliver and use local services. The Council will seek to achieve Many Channels – One Service. The Council will review options to increase channel choice for customers, whilst ensuring consistent customer service standards. The Council will ensure that its public meetings remain accessible to all, including access via digital means.

Theme	Action
1. Responding to the changing needs of our customers in a post Covid-19 world.	The Council will explore opportunities to further enhance accessibility by the use of technology. *(Strategy & Governance)*
2. Responding to an increasing demand to work virtually and in a more digitally enabled world	There are two elements to this: 1. What we do within the wider West Berkshire community. 2. What we do as a Council. On the former there is a Digital Strategy which is being developed for Berkshire through the Digital Infrastructure Group. This has only just been completed and focuses on the themes of full fibre, 5g and filling gaps in existing 4g coverage.

Priority 7 – Seizing the positives that has emerged from the Pandemic but not forgetting those we have lost; those whose lives will be forever changed; and those who have supported our local communities during the Pandemic, including our own staff.

Theme	Action
1. Taking the opportunity to embed the positive aspects of the working practices that have had to be put in place during the Covid-19 Pandemic.	This is being embraced within the Workforce Strategy and the Timelord 2 Programme. *(Accommodation Group : Workforce Board)* Public Health will lead on implementing ICP funded workplace physical activity initiatives through 2020-21. The Council will seek to learn from these and engage with staff in order to establish best healthy workplace practices for West Berkshire Council employees moving forwards. *(Communities and Wellbeing)*
2. Using Outcome Based Budgeting to help redirect resources to help support recovery and renewal priorities.	This will be built into budget build process this year. *(Finance and Property)*
3. Remembering those we have lost and those whose lives had been adversely impact on by the Pandemic.	*'Blooming into Spring'* remembering those who has died by planting circa 250 white flowering cherry trees across the District in a number of groves to mark the start of the first Lockdown in the Spring of 2020. *(Environment)* Remembering those who have lost their life to Covid-19 or been adversely affected by it holding an annual event which could also be potentially linked to the Celebrating suggestion below.

Theme	Action
3. Remembering those we have lost and those whose lives had been adversely impact on by the Pandemic.	Celebrating a better future through embedding the achievements relating to our renewal priorities in our communications. *(Strategy and Governance)*