

REPORT TO EMERGENCY COMMITTEE

27 May 2020

Subject:	COVID-19 Reset and Recovery Planning – Roadmap of Activity
Director:	Chief Executive David Stevens
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
Contact Officer(s):	Neil Cox Director of Prevention & Protection Kate Ashley Strategic Lead: Service Improvement

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Emergency Committee:

1. Endorse the framework for reset and recovery as outlined in the report.
2. Supports the approach to restarting services as soon as is safe to do so and appropriate health and safety measures have been put into place.
3. Approve the Discretionary Business Grants policy as set out in appendix 2a.
4. Give approval for the Director of Adult Social Care, in conjunction with the Director of Public Health, to administer the Adults Social Care Infection Fund ring fenced grant in line with Government guidance as set out in appendix 5.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report sets out the activity that the council will undertake to reset services following the COVID-19 pandemic and plan for the recovery of the organisation and Sandwell as a whole. The implementation of these plans is responsive to the local context and national policy changes and builds in the necessary flexibility and resilience.
- 1.2 The approach to developing the reset and recovery plan will be framed by the strategic priorities of the Corporate Plan, as agreed by Council in March 2020, and Sandwell's Vision 2030. These provide the direction for recovery, whilst enabling flexibility to take advantage of the transformational opportunities now available to us as an organisation and as a borough. The Reset and Recovery Plan will enable us to focus on the future, not return to 'business as usual'. We will maximise the opportunities to reform, re-imagine and re-invent by using a set of working principles that will drive our innovation as one council, one team.
- 1.3 Communication with, and engagement of, our communities will be key to the success of our recovery. We will engage with our communities, our businesses, our partners and our staff to ensure that recovery is designed and implemented with communities. Clear communications will underpin our journey to ensure everyone understands the plans and remains as safe as possible during changes to service provision.
- 1.4 Our planning activity will be in the context of a fundamentally different economic and social landscape than before the pandemic, not only for the council but for the communities that we serve. It is essential to keep in mind the significant financial impact on all councils of COVID-19, and therefore the financial pressure that local government faces over the short, medium and longer term will be a key factor of our reset and recovery plans.
- 1.5 Appended to this report is series of short reports for members to consider on the latest position on COVID-19 and key areas of response activity:
 - Financial position (Appendix 1)
 - Business Grants (Appendix 2 & 2a)
 - Shielding (Appendix 3)
 - Personal Protection Equipment (Appendix 4)
- 1.6 Due to the dynamic, evolving situation and the rate at which national guidance is changing, it is imperative that members are provided with the most up-to-date information upon which to base decisions, which often limits the ability for information to be provided within previously agreed timescales.

2 IMPLICATION FOR VISION 2030

- 2.1 The aim of the Reset and Recovery Plan is to develop resourced business plans that will achieve the strategic outcomes set out in the Corporate Plan 'Big Plans for a Great Place', as approved by Council in March 2020. The Corporate Plan sets out the council's contribution to achieving Vision 2030, therefore this report will impact all the Ambitions.

3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 On 6 May 2020, the Emergency Committee approved the council's approach to the Recovery and Reset Plan. This set out the political, financial and social context within which the council will need to plan its recovery. The report stated that the development of the recovery plan will be driven by the strategic outcomes set out in Sandwell Council's Corporate Plan "Big Plans for a Great Place for the People of Sandwell", as agreed on 10 March 2020:



- 3.1.2 These priorities were shaped by our engagement with local people and partners on the borough's 2030 Vision. Our conversations with local people shaped our understanding of what is important to them:

- A warm, affordable and secure place to live
- A good level of income to make ends meet and the skills to take advantage of job opportunities
- An attractive, clean place to live within a thriving, supportive community

- 3.1.3 These values remain at the heart of what we do and this report sets out the proposed plan of activity for moving the council from response through to reset and to recovery. The aim of this approach is to develop robust plans that will deliver the overarching strategic priorities of the Corporate Plan, having first understood the impact of the pandemic on

our existing plans, our staff and our communities. Throughout this work, the focus will be on the future, not 'getting back to normal'.

3.2 Working Principles

3.2.1 To ensure we are taking full advantage of the opportunities for transformation that reset and recovery offer us, it is proposed to establish a set of working principles that will drive development of our recovery plans. These will enable services to challenge themselves and each other to maximise opportunities for innovation, and ensure we are adopting a One Council: One Team approach to delivering the priorities in the Corporate Plan.

3.2.2 The proposed working principles are as follows:

- **Focus on the future, not back to normal** – take the opportunity to build on what has worked well and reset our business based on the new world so that we align ourselves to delivering the strategic outcomes of the Corporate Plan. Focusing on the new imperatives and being clear about how our services contribute to delivering 'Big Plans for a Great Place'.
- **Social distancing is the new normal** – safety of employees and the community is paramount, and it is expected that social distancing measures will be in place for the foreseeable future. How do we need to prepare for the new normal?
- **Move with the Digital Evolution** – continuing to deliver services remotely as far as possible and where this has worked effectively. This will minimise the need to have face-to-face contact with others, as well as enable the council to truly have the capacity to provide services to those most vulnerable in our communities. We must identify where this is not already possible, and link with existing technological and digital strategies to enable this and to ensure a consistent approach across the council.
- **Live within our means** – understand our financial position and be realistic and open about what can be achieved and when, and what can no longer be delivered within the resources available to us. Ensure future resilience by having sufficient reserves available to respond effectively to emergencies
- **Think creatively and innovate** – look at how services can be delivered differently when faced with varying drivers, such as rationalising the use of buildings or reducing face-to-face contact.
- **Collaborate and co-produce** services and functions wherever we can – harnessing the community mutual support that has been

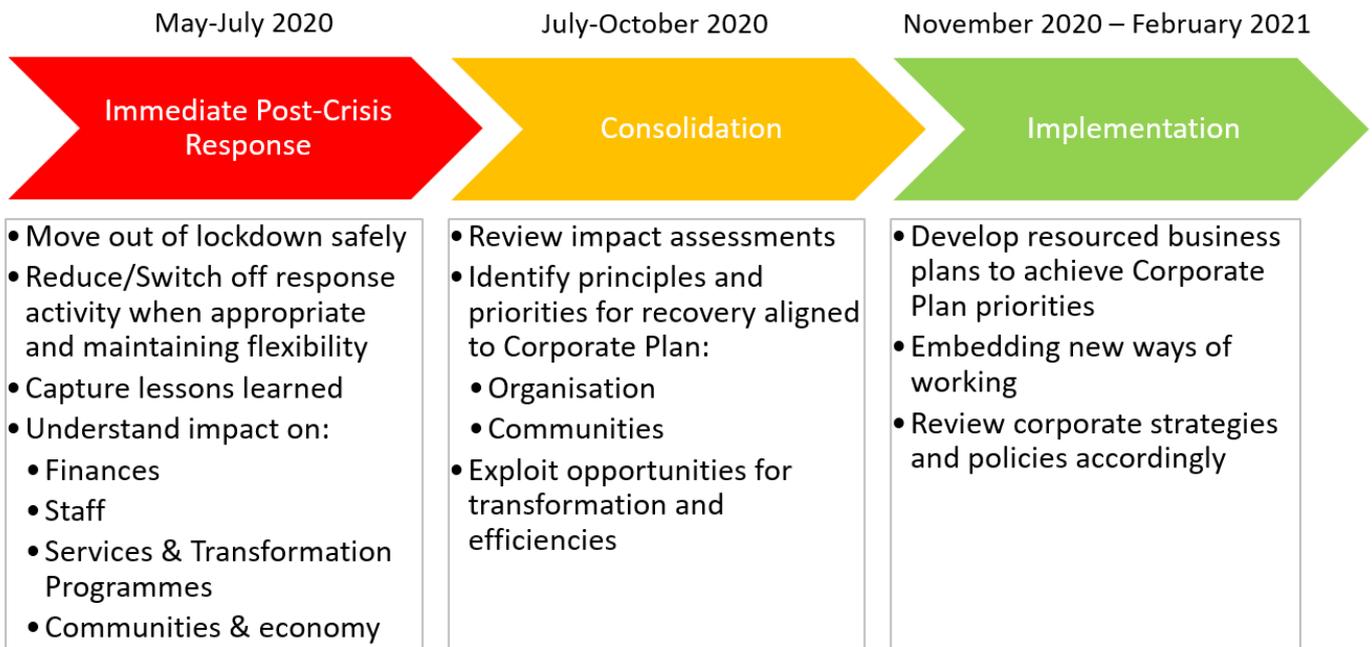
evident during this crisis and deliver smartly with partners. It will be especially important to engage regionally, where Sandwell needs to be part of the bigger regional picture/conversation so that we maximise the opportunities for Sandwell residents and businesses.

- **Exploit opportunities for transformation and efficiencies** – be brave about what the council and the functions it delivers needs to look like in the future. Ask ourselves: what needs to be done? What can be done differently? What can we stop doing?
- **The future is green** - exploit opportunities to drive a green recovery, identifying what activities can change that would have a positive impact on the environment and continuing the green benefits from lockdown where possible.
- **Learning the lessons** – shaping our plans based on lessons of the past. Keeping elements that went well and addressing what did not work so that we become more resilient for the future.
- **Communication/engagement is king** – recovery must be developed with affected communities, not done to them. Communication and engagement activity will take staff, the public and members with us on the journey to recovery. Capture feedback on what service users think about the new way of delivering the service in the crisis
- **Embed Community Wealth principles in our approach** – make our recovery activity work even harder to maximise the benefit seen by Sandwell residents by adopting these principles in the development of our plans: progressive procurement, fair employment, socially just use of land and assets, making financial power work locally and plural ownership of the economy.
- **Intelligence and evidence driven** – find out what the data and intelligence is telling us about the needs/demand of our communities, and how it has changed following the pandemic.
- **Empower the workforce to retain a flexible and resilient approach** – provide staff with the policies, processes, tools and culture to retain the resilience and flexibility we have seen in the response phase to deliver smarter and more effective services with a one council approach

3.3 Phased Roadmap of Activity

3.3.1 A phased approach is proposed to develop the council's Reset and Recovery Plan. This is set out in the diagram below, and reflects the approach taken at the regional level.

3.3.2 The timings proposed are indicative and may need to flex to respond to changes in infection rates and national policies. Details of specific activity set out in this diagram is included in the report below.



3.4 Phase 1 – Immediate Post-Crisis Response

3.4.1 **Move out of lockdown safely**

3.4.1.1 There are numerous considerations we need to be aware of when making plans for the return of services, and paramount is the safety of our staff and service users. We will not be able to immediately return to the level of services operating before the pandemic for several reasons:

- Continuing to deliver 'response' activity, using council facilities and redeployed staff for as long as is required – these will be reduced over time where appropriate, but we will need to maintain flexibility to accommodate any future peaks in infection or reintroduction of national restrictions;
- Ensuring our staff are safe at work and risk assessments undertaken to identify appropriate mitigating measures;

- Our buildings will only be able to accommodate around 25% of the workforce whilst maintaining appropriate social distancing measures;
- Some of the workforce will not be available due to continued shielding, self-isolation or sickness;
- Some activities delivered before lockdown may not be viable in the post-pandemic world;
- Financial pressures may mean activities are delayed or ceased as resources are diverted to other priorities.

3.4.1.2 Availability of staff will be a fluctuating position that will influence decisions on which services are restarted and when. Currently, 226 staff across the council are shielding and will continue to do so until guidance changes. Those in the critically vulnerable category have been advised to continue shielding for six months; those who are able to work from home will continue to do so, however this will impact staff availability for those services where functions cannot be performed remotely. We must also factor into our planning the anticipated increase in sickness absence and self-isolation as a result of reducing lockdown measures and the likely spread of the virus in the general population.

3.4.1.3 We will take a holistic and risk managed approach to determine which services recommence or return to operating from council buildings. This may mean that some services continue to operate remotely or at a reduced level to provide capacity for services identified as a priority to restart or scale up in response to local need or national policy. We will also review the working arrangements of services that have continued to operate from existing bases during the response phase, and implement any lessons learned to increase capacity in the overall estate where possible. Taking a 'one council, one team' approach to developing the reset and recovery plan will ensure local needs are prioritised and addressed in a planned and phased approach.

3.4.1.4 Decisions as to which services restart and when will be made at the appropriate level and recorded to ensure transparency and accountability. The officer level Reset and Recovery Board, as set out below in Section 8 Governance, will maintain an overview of this activity. The Board will also determine where services need to be scaled back in response to reintroduction of restrictions and changes to national policy as necessary.

3.4.1.5 We must ensure that, where staff are returning to operate from council buildings, appropriate risk assessments have been carried out and mitigating actions are in place as far as possible. This will include

ensuring returning staff have received the appropriate training to implement safe working practices.

3.4.1.6 We will also ensure that our policies reflect required changes and enable the council to continue to operate in a flexible manner, maintaining the safety and wellbeing of the workforce as far as possible.

3.4.2 Impact Assessments

3.4.2.1 Paramount to this process is our understanding of the impact that the pandemic and lockdown restrictions have had in order to determine our priorities for recovery:

- **Finances** – as acknowledged in the Reset & Recovery report to Emergency Committee on 6 May 2020, the financial impact on the council will be significant. This will not only be in terms of increased spend on response activities, but also the reduction in income, and the ability to deliver the council's medium-term financial strategy. This financial pressure will be a constant feature of our recovery. An initial financial impact of the pandemic on Sandwell Council's medium-term financial strategy is appended to this report at appendix 1.
- **Services** – we will assess the impact on how service delivery has changed during the response phase to drive decisions on what services will be needed in the short, medium and longer term. These will then fall into the following categories that will be considered as part of the development of the recovery plan:
 - services that have continued, but delivered differently (e.g. corporate contact centre staff working from home or adapting social work practices so that Level 3 Care Act easements (requiring notification to DHSC) have not had to be applied);
 - services that have been suspended and need to restart (e.g. grass cutting in parks to enable residents to exercise outdoors);
 - services that have been suspended and are not required in the immediate future;
 - New services that have been delivered to respond to the pandemic and cannot yet be scaled down.

- **Transformation programmes and projects** – work on numerous key programmes and projects has been reprofiled, slowed down or suspended due to the focus of the council on responding to the pandemic. Therefore, the delivery of the expected benefits of these transformations may be delayed or the detailed activity of such programmes may need to change in response to a change in priorities of the council. Key projects, such as Information Governance, Oracle Fusion, Technology Modernisation Project, the Senior Management Restructure, Workplace Vision Programme and Governance Review are all critical to our recovery and activity has now recommenced at pace.
- **Staff** – the flexibility and commitment of our staff has enabled the council to successfully respond to the pandemic and continue delivering vital services to the vulnerable in our communities. We must acknowledge that this has been an uncertain and stressful time for some staff and will continue to be as the situation evolves. Therefore, we need to understand the impact on our staff's physical and mental wellbeing so that we can provide the necessary support. We also need to capture the positive impacts on staff of flexibility, changes to working practices, development of skills from redeployment activities and the relationship with Trade Unions. Embedding this positive learning in our policies and practices will build a more resilient workforce that is better able to respond to future emergencies or changes in priorities.
- **Communities** – COVID-19, restrictions on daily life and the inability to access support services will have had a significant impact on our communities. It is anticipated that the most vulnerable in our society will have been adversely impacted, leading to increases in demand for some services as restrictions are lifted. It may take years to fully understand the impact on the health and wellbeing of our communities and we will need to work with them to identify where we need to focus our recovery activity.
- **Economy** – the pandemic has already had a major impact on the national economy, and this will have a disproportionate impact on areas such as Sandwell with existing high levels of deprivation. Government guidance on minimising the use of public transport to enable social distancing will have a significant impact on the population of Sandwell, from their ability to access basic necessities and jobs, to impacts on air quality as car usage increases. Our engagement and participation at regional level with the Combined Authority, LEP and Midland Engine to determine the economic impact and plan our recovery is crucial to our journey.

3.4.3 Lessons Learned

- 3.4.3.1 It should be recognised that, when the pandemic hit and the council moved into response phase, staff across the council stepped up to the challenge. Not only have large numbers of staff embraced home working, supported by the ICT Service, we have also worked hard to implement national policy changes quickly and found creative ways of working to enable services to continue to operate remotely. For example, around £38m in Business Grants have been issued to 70% of eligible businesses in Sandwell, and a significant amount of customer contact has shifted from face-to-face to different channels to enable residents to do their business with us. Work has commenced to capture lessons around changes to working arrangements through the Workplace Vision staff survey.
- 3.4.3.2 We have also embraced different ways of working with our partners and communities to deliver response services. Relationships and ways of working with partners that have developed through responding to the pandemic must be built upon so that we do not revert to old practices in the future. It should be acknowledged that the offer from the voluntary and community sector has shifted, with communities coming forward to support each other rather than needing the council full time.
- 3.4.3.3 These lessons of cross council working, innovation in service delivery, flexibility of staff and working with partners and communities will be captured and utilised into the council's recovery plan.

3.5 Phase 2 – Consolidation

3.5.1 The collection of intelligence in Phase 1 will drive the activity in the second and third phases of recovery planning and implementation. Once the initial impact of the pandemic has been understood, priorities for recovery can be identified in line with the working principles set out in this report and aligned to the strategic priorities of the Corporate Plan. These will be separated into priorities for:

- Our Communities – delivering the outcomes that local people have told us are important to them; and
- Our Organisation – building on our experiences to embed the 'One Council, One Team' approach.

3.5.2 Throughout this phase, we will identify and draw on opportunities for innovation, transformation and efficiencies, ever mindful of the financial pressures on the council and the working principles set out in this report.

3.5.3 Engagement with all stakeholders will be key to developing these priorities and ensuring that we take our staff and communities on the journey with us. Initial proposals will be put forward to members for approval at the appropriate time.

3.6 Phase 3 – Implementation

3.6.1 Once the priorities for recovery have been identified and agreed, we will develop business plans that set out the activities to achieve those priorities, aligned to the strategic outcomes in the Corporate Plan. These will be aligned to the resources available to ensure that the council can deliver a balanced budget over the medium-term.

3.6.2 This will be the time to fully embed new ways of working that have been established during the response phase and, through the impact assessments and lessons learned, have been shown to be successful. Corporate strategies and policies will be reviewed accordingly to align with recovery priorities and enable the council to function most effectively.

4 **THE CURRENT POSITION**

4.1 Work has commenced on identifying the services that need to recommence or move to operating from council buildings, as well as preparing our buildings and staff for this to happen. The immediate priority for the Reset and Recovery Plan is the planning for returning services to operate from the council estate or restarting those services that had been suspended due to lockdown restrictions. This will be a risk managed approach and involve ensuring our buildings are appropriately set up and staff are supported to work safely. Services will only reopen or restart when it is safe to do so for our staff and our service users.

4.2 During the response phase, work commenced on conducting initial impact assessments on services, our economy and our communities. This work will now be accelerated and will form part of the engagement activities with staff, members and other stakeholders as set out below.

5 **CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)**

5.1 Underpinning our entire reset and recovery journey is our Communication and Engagement Plan. Whether it be our staff, our partners or our

communities, we want to make sure that everyone has a voice and is able to help shape our recovery.

5.2 This will ensure that our workforce and members:

- are familiar with the strategic priorities in the Corporate Plan that will drive our reset and recovery and with our aim as a borough to deliver Vision 2030;
- understand the roadmap of activity to reset and recovery; and
- ensure everyone is able to be a part of our journey.

5.3 A high-level Communication and Engagement Plan is appended to this report at Appendix 5. This sets out the key initial activities that will be carried out to start engagement with staff and members.

5.4 We are also collecting information from services across the council regarding how they are communicating and consulting with their key stakeholders regarding demand and need for services.

5.5 All the conversations that take place as part of our engagement activity will generate intelligence that actively drives forward our recovery through the Working Groups referred to in the Governance Framework below and the Reset and Recovery Board.

5.6 We recognise that as a council none of our services are delivered in isolation, everything we do has an impact on services delivered by our partners. That is why throughout our reset and recovery journey we will work with our Strategic Partnerships to ensure that Sandwell's recovery delivers the very best outcomes possible for our communities.

6 **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

6.1 The proposed framework set out in this report will result in the development of plans to enable the organisation and the borough to recover from the impact of COVID-19, and therefore alternative options are not required at this stage. When developing approaches and determine specific activities, it will be essential to consider alternative options to ensure the most appropriate way forward is agreed.

7 **STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

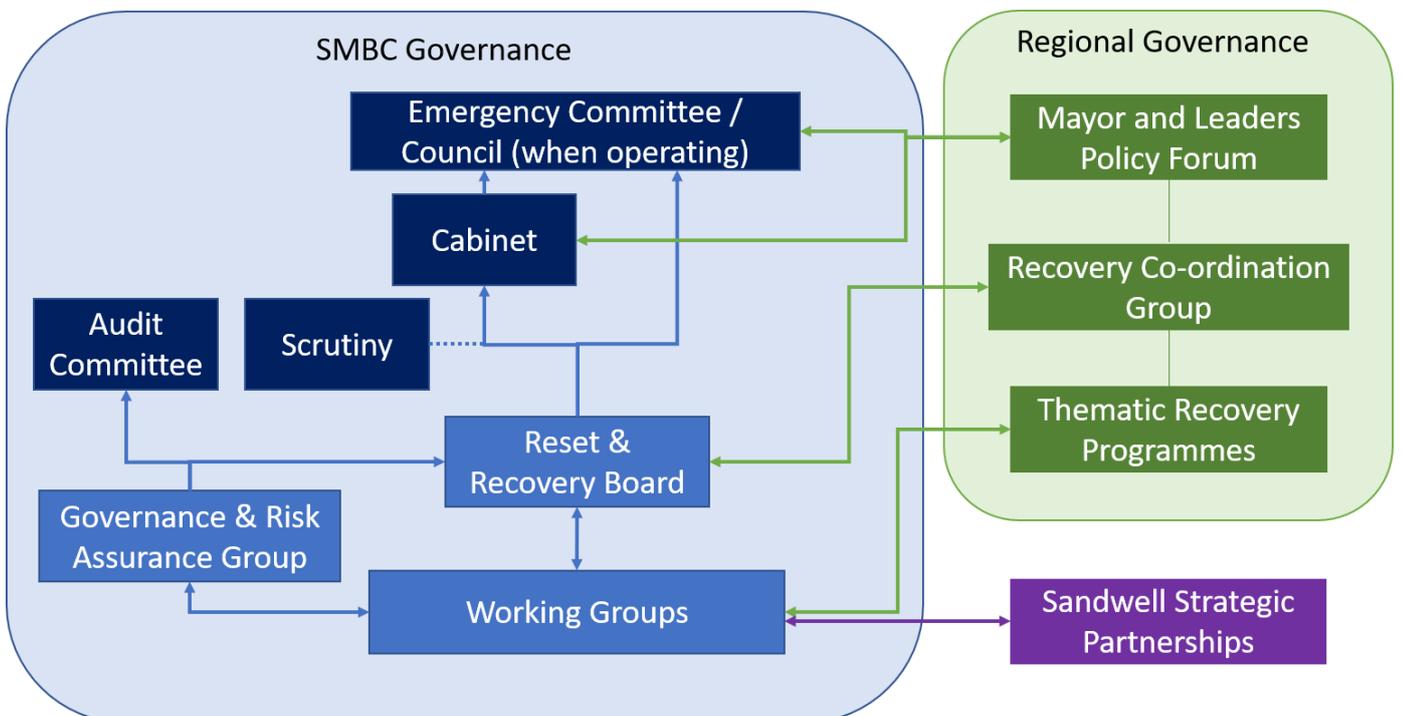
7.1 The development of the Reset and Recovery Plan will not require specific resources over and above those already allocated to corporate planning activities within the 2020/21 budget.

7.2 Integral to the approach is the understanding of the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the council's budget and medium-term financial strategy. This will influence all reset and recovery activity and is embedded in the Working Principles set out above. Specific implications on our strategic resources will be identified as part of the budget and business plans that will be developed as a result of the approach set out in this report.

8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 Transparency in decision making and accountability for delivery of the Reset and Recovery Plan will be key to its success. Governance will feed into the existing democratic arrangements and develop over time as more functions come back online. Links to regional activity will be key to the recovery of the council and borough, working in partnership with others, sharing intelligence and maximising the opportunities for Sandwell as whole.

8.2 The diagram below sets out the proposed governance structure for Sandwell's recovery plan development and implementation. It demonstrates the levels at which we will need to link with regional activity and local partnerships to direct our own plans.



8.3 The key elements of the council's Reset and Recovery Governance Framework are:

- **Members** – Elected members will set the direction of the plan, with decisions made at appropriate level of the council – for routine running of the council this will be through to Cabinet via Scrutiny, and for decisions that require Council approval this will be directly to the Emergency Committee until such a time that full Council can be facilitated. Links to regional policy development activity will be incorporated at this level.
- **Reset & Recovery Board** – Chaired by the Chief Executive, this senior officer group will retain oversight of activity and developments across the working groups to identify interdependencies, duplication and conflict within plans to arrive at a 'one council, one team' approach to reset and recovery. This group has met during the response phase to monitor activity on the council's Resilience Response Plan and will continue to do so until response activity is no longer required. The Board will make decisions on services restarting or scaling back in response to future restrictions, seeking member approval where appropriate. Through this Board, Leadership Team will communicate effectively with the organisation and take staff on the journey to the new ways of working. Activity from Regional Recovery Co-ordination Group will be fed in at this level.
- **Working Groups** – these cross-council working groups will be responsible for developing plans and approaches and will feed into the Reset & Recovery Board for co-ordination and approval. Initial working groups have been established to develop the plan for restarting services/returning to council buildings, including ensuring the buildings are set up for social distancing and our HR services and policies are in a position to support staff to return to buildings. Once the priorities for recovery have been identified through Phase 1 activity, further cross-council working groups will be established to develop the plans. These will be focused on not only the working principles but the specific outcomes we are trying to achieve as an organisation and those imperatives for action with our partners. Working groups will also be project specific in order to ensure our existing transformation projects align with the future priorities of the council. The purpose and themes of these working groups will remain responsive as the context around us continues to evolve and change over time. We will need to bring in activity from across our local partnerships and regional thematic recovery programmes to align our approaches and maximise opportunities from shared ways of working.

- **Risk management and assurance** – this has been built into our impact assessment process, we already have intelligence on how COVID-19 has impacted on our known risks and on what new risks have arisen as a result of this situation. Risk management will continue to be an integral part of our recovery journey, oversight of which will be maintained at officer level by the Governance & Risk Assurance Group, and from a member perspective, by the Audit Committee when operating.

9 **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and no specific activity is required on the framework set out in this report. However, the impact assessments of COVID-19 carried out as part of this framework will highlight if any specific groups have been impacted more than others. This intelligence will drive priorities and activity within the Reset and Recovery Plan.
- 9.2 Throughout the development of the Reset and Recovery Plan, equality impact assessments will be conducted on specific proposals at the appropriate time.

10 **DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 10.1 Any information used to compile this report is subject to information governance legislation and is managed in accordance with the council's policies and protocols. A Data Protection Impact Assessment is not required.

11 **CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 11.1 There is no requirement to carry out a Crime and Disorder and Risk Assessment.

12 **SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS**

- 12.1 This information is contained within the main body of the report and will be incorporated into specific plans developed as a result of this framework.

13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

- 13.1 The immediate impact of COVID-19 on the health and wellbeing of both Sandwell residents and council staff will be captured through the impact assessments that will be conducted as part of this framework. These impact assessments will identify priorities for action that will be incorporated into the Reset and Recovery Plan. The longer-term impacts will not be understood for some time, and it will be important to continue to update our impact assessments throughout the planning period to ensure our activity address the key issues.

14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

- 14.1 The restart of services and the return of services to operating from the council estate requires a co-ordinated and planned approach to ensure staff and service users are as safe as possible. Risk assessments and appropriate mitigations will need to be in place before these services are 'switched on'. Work is underway to prepare our buildings for returning staff.
- 14.2 Throughout the response phase of the pandemic, a high proportion of staff have successfully operated remotely working at home. We are capturing the lessons from staff throughout this period to understand what works and how to address barriers that arise. This intelligence will be incorporated into our plans for a future flexible workforce.
- 14.3 As part of the development of the Reset and Recovery Plan and in response to increased financial pressures on council budgets, we will need to review the council's corporate estate rationalise costs and ensure it accommodates the future needs of a more flexible workforce.

15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 15.1 Members are asked to endorse the framework for reset and recovery as outlined in the report to provide the council the direction to effectively move forward from response phase to recovery. In order to capture intelligence from a range of stakeholders to inform the planning activity and future priorities for recovery, members are also asked to endorse the Reset and Recovery Communications and Engagement Plan.

- 15.2 Members are also asked to approve the Discretionary Business Grants policy which can be found at appendix 2 and 2a
- 15.3 Due to the quickly evolving situation and changes to national guidance and local requirements, it will be key to the swift and effective recovery of the council and the borough that suspended services restart as soon as possible. Therefore, members are asked to delegate the necessary authority to the Chief Executive to restart services as soon as is safe to do so and appropriate health and safety measures have been put into place.

16 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- Big Plans for a Great Place – Sandwell Council’s Corporate Plan, March 2020
- Report to Emergency Committee - Post COVID-19 Recovery and Reset 6 May 2020

17 **APPENDICES:**

- Financial position (Appendix 1)
- Business Grants (Appendix 2 & 2a)
- Shielding (Appendix 3)
- Personal Protection Equipment (Appendix 4)
- Adult Social Care Infection Control Fund (Appendix 5)

David Stevens
Chief Executive