


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

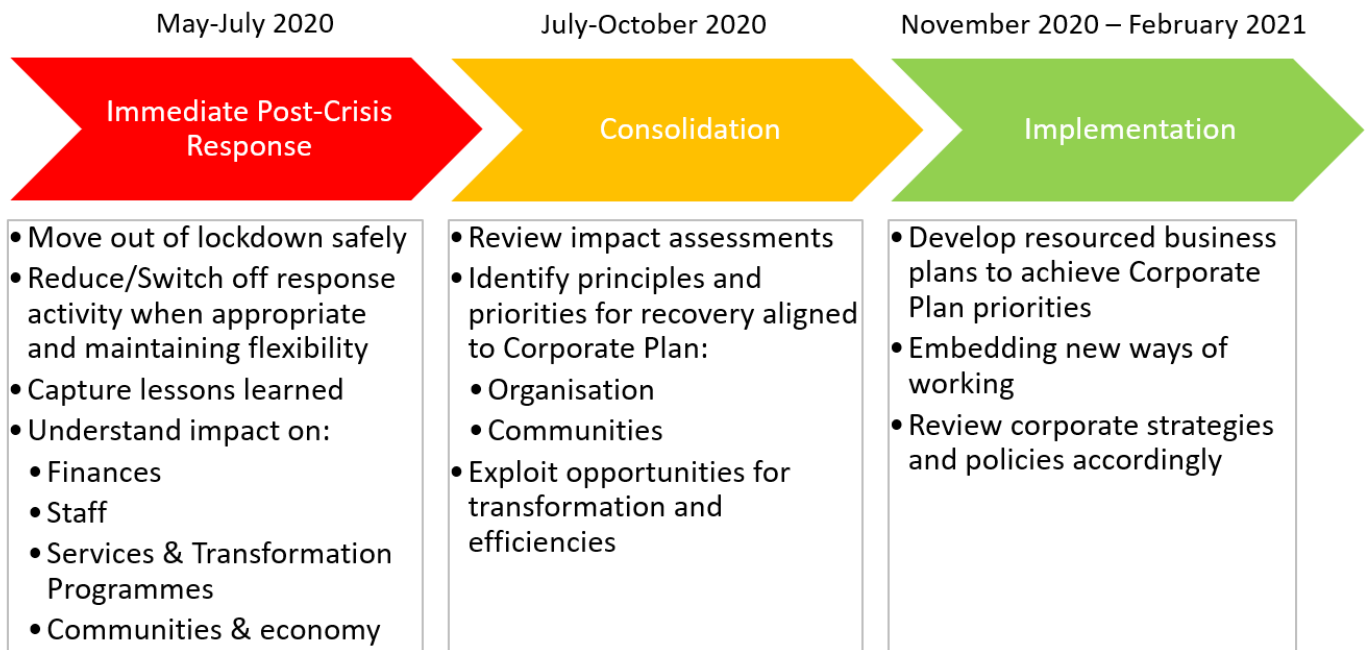
evident during this crisis and deliver smartly with partners. It will be especially important to engage regionally, where Sandwell needs to be part of the bigger regional picture/conversation so that we maximise the opportunities for Sandwell residents and businesses.

- **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**

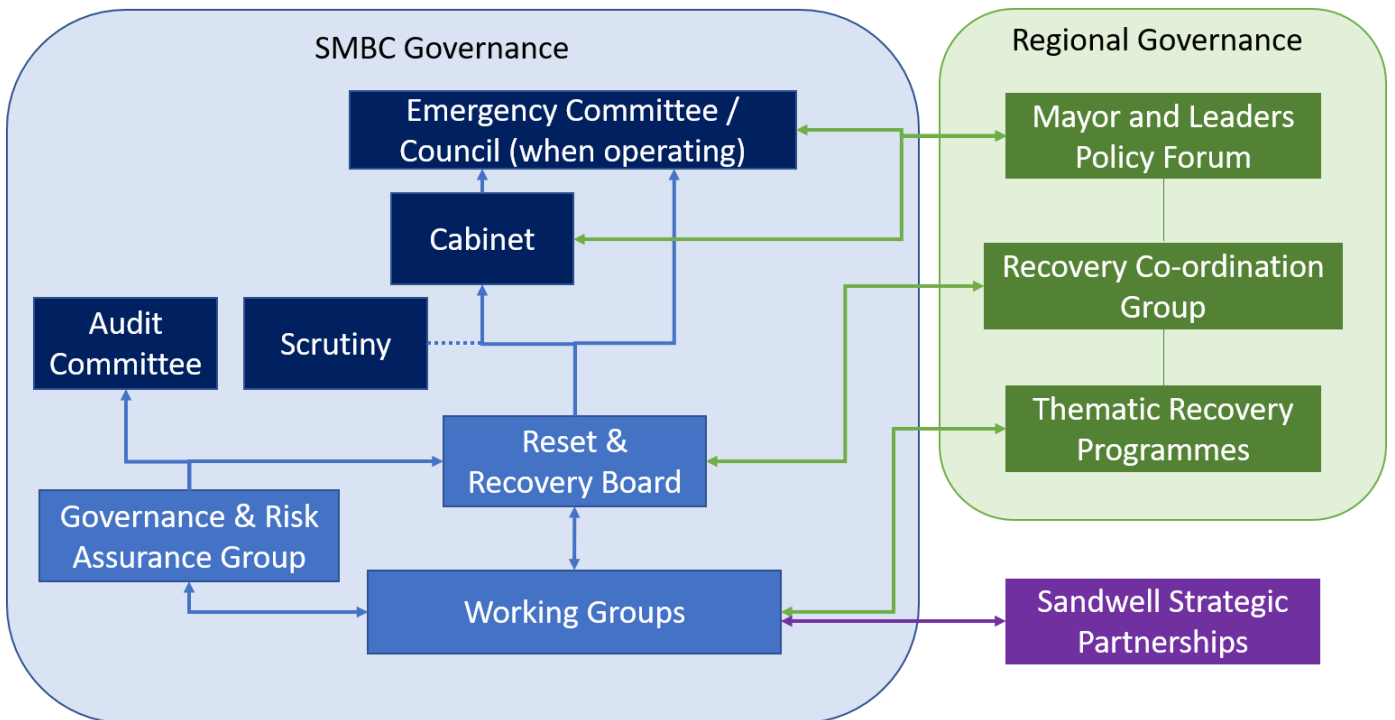
7.1 The development of the Reset and Recovery Plan will not require specific resources over and above those already allocated to corporate planning activities within the 2020/21 budget.

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)

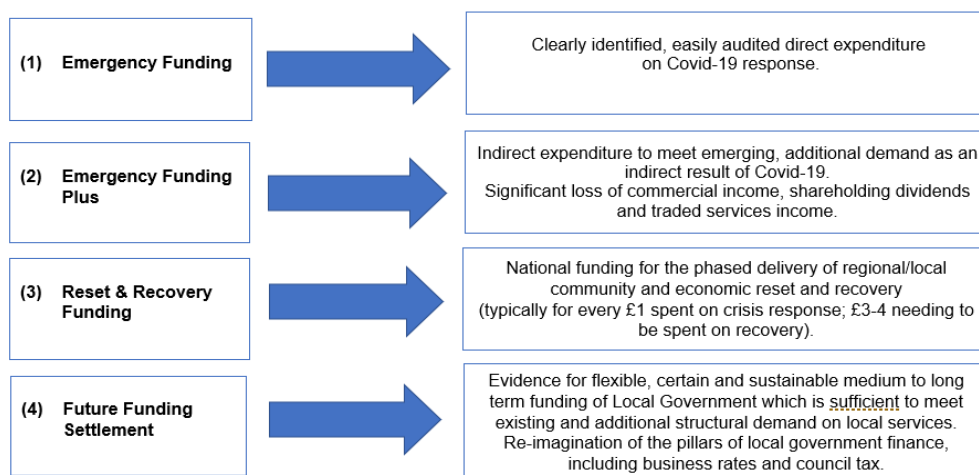
David Stevens
Chief Executive

SHORT REPORT	
Subject Matter	Financial Impact of Covid19
Lead Officer	Rebecca Maher (Acting 151)
Date	26 th May 2020
Decision	To note the contents of this report



1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant financial impact on the current financial position of the council. This has been in the form of both additional expenditure and a loss of income from various sources.
- 1.2 A log of all financial pressures is being maintained and updated on a regular basis. This is used to complete returns that are submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on a monthly basis.
- 1.3 The council's budget for 2020/21 was approved at Council on 10 March 2020. This was predicated on several assumptions around the level of income that could be achieved from various sources along with the successful delivery of planned savings across directorates.
- 1.4 Regional conversations with government around the funding requirements for local authorities have been based on the following framework: -



- 1.5 MHCLG are due to issue guidance shortly setting out which financial pressures they will fund, and it is expected that this will confirm that only the first two criteria – Emergency Funding and Emergency Funding Plus – will be covered. This guidance is likely to have an impact on the figures, and increase the shortfall, set out in this report.
- 1.6 No changes have currently been made to the Section 151 responsibilities of the Chief Finance Officer nor the requirements of Section 114 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 which means that the council is still legally required to operate within a balanced budget. If this is not possible then remedial action would need to be taken in order to avoid the issuing of a S114 notice.

2 CURRENT IMPACT – APRIL TO JULY 2020

- 2.1 The funding that the council has received from the Government in response to Covid-19 is set out in the table below: -

Income Stream	£m
Council Tax – Hardship Relief	4.547
Small Business Grants	73.036
Care Homes – Infection Control	2.876
Emergency Funding – Tranche 1	12.495
Emergency Funding – Tranche 2	9.083
Total	102.037

- 2.2 Only the emergency funding of **£21.578m** is unringfenced and can be used to fund the range of financial pressures being incurred.

- 2.3 The latest version of the MHCLG return was submitted on 15 May 2020. This reported estimated financial pressures of **£24.385m**, which is made up of **£10.566m** additional expenditure and **£13.819m** loss of income. This is based on the assumption, specified by the MHCLG, which is that the current circumstances continue for a period of 4 months i.e. until the end of July. This leaves a shortfall of **£2.807m** which would need to be funded from the council's reserves unless compensating savings are identified during the financial year.
- 2.4 The Finance Management Team and Statutory Officer Group have approved a document which sets out the principles on which this emergency funding should be allocated. The financial pressures are now being assessed against these principles and a further decision-making process will be required to approve the allocation of the grant following this. If it is decided that some of the areas included in the MHCLG return are not eligible to be funded from this grant, the shortfall outlined above will increase.
- 2.5 It should be noted that the figures in this return are still high-level estimates as it is difficult to know exactly how long the impact of some of the financial pressures will be experienced for. Whilst the MHCLG's assumption of a 'return to normality' from July seems unlikely, it will take time to assess the real effect of the relaxing of lockdown measures on council services.

Additional Expenditure

- 2.6 The additional expenditure is broken down across the following key headings (as specified by the MHCLG return): -

Area	£m	Details
Adult Social Care (ASC)	5.304	Further details below (2.7)
Children's Social Care	0.241	Additional/exceptional placement costs
Children's Services – Other	0.601	Reparation sessions, increased S17 claims
Education	0.930	FSM Vouchers (Summer Holidays), Early Years provider support
Cultural & Related	0.002	Signs for parks
Environment & Regulatory	1.006	Temporary mortuary
Finance & Corporate	0.121	Additional ICT costs – home working and remote committee meetings
Other – Shielding	0.533	Food parcels for vulnerable residents
Other – PPE (non-ASC & HRA)	0.015	

Area	£m	Details
Other – unachieved savings/delayed projects	1.811	Further details below (2.8)
Total	10.566	

Adult Social Care Additional Expenditure – Further Details

2.7 The Adult Social Care additional expenditure incorporates the following areas:

Area	£m	Details
Additional Demand	0.808	Purchase of additional beds and access to flats in order to allow faster discharge from hospitals.
Supporting the Market	3.231	This relates to the paper that was presented to Emergency Committee on 6 May regarding support to Care Homes.
Workforce Pressures	0.590	Additional Social Workers and Care Assistants
PPE	0.675	Purchase of PPE
Total	5.304	

Unachieved Savings/Delayed Projects – Further Details

2.8 Although the council was able to set the 2020/21 budget without the need for savings by individual directorates or the use of reserves, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy did include some existing planned savings. There are also budget pressures that were due to be addressed during 2020/21. Staff in both Adult Social Care and Prevention & Protection directorates are currently focussed on Covid-19 and therefore the work required to implement these savings and address budget pressures has been delayed.

2.9 Savings that were planned and are now unlikely to be achieved include: -

- Consultation on non-residential charging in Adult Social Care deferred for 1 year
- Review of Adult Social Care placements – delayed by 6 months

2.10 Existing budget pressures that directorates were working on addressing, and that have been partly included in the latest MHCLG return, include: -

- Children’s Services SEND transport - £2.700m in 2019/20
- Neighbourhoods Property Maintenance Account – £1.200m in 2019/20

Loss of income - General

2.11 The council is experiencing a loss of income in the following areas: -

Area	£m	Details
Education – Other	0.644	Residential Education Centres
Highways and Transport	1.348	Car parking and enforcement charges
Cultural & Related – Sports, Leisure & Community Facilities	0.850	Fees & charges generated in parks, libraries and museums. Sandwell Valley car parking income.
Environment & Regulatory – Other	0.503	Income from enforcement activity / proceeds of crime. Fees from events at Registration Services (weddings)
Planning & Development	0.599	Building control & planning fees
Finance & Corporate – Other	2.561	Investment income, income from Templink, Printing and traded Legal Services
Other	1.234	Income form Markets (internal & external) and rental income from commercial properties and ad hoc room rentals.
Total	7.739	

2.12 The loss of income included in this table assume that services reopen and reintroduce charges from the beginning of August, in line with the MHCLG assumption, which may not be possible. In some of these areas, the loss of income is definite as the service has closed or charging ceased e.g. car parking. However, in other areas assumptions have been made about the likely level of non-payment as a result of the suspension of debt enforcement activity and the expected economic downturn.

Loss of income – council Tax and Business Rates

2.13 The April statistics for council Tax and Business Rates have been reviewed and has identified a total estimated loss of income in these areas of **£6.079m** made up of: -

- 1% reduction in council Tax collection rate – estimated loss of income of £1.996m for the full financial year
- 2% reduction in Business Rates collection rate – estimated loss of income of £1.083m for the full financial year
- Significant increases in applications for the council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) – estimated loss of income of £3.000m for the full financial year

- 2.14 These figures are likely to change as the year progresses because there are still Business Rates reliefs to be entered into the system and CTRS applications to be processed. CTRS eligibility also changes during the financial year based on residents' financial circumstances and therefore these may alter as lockdown measures are eased.

3 LOOKING AHEAD – 2020/21

- 3.1 A review of the 2020/21 budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) has identified further planned savings and existing budget pressures that are unlikely to be possible to address in the current circumstances. These are explained further below.

Neighbourhoods - Property Maintenance Account

- 3.2 There have been ongoing pressures on the Property Maintenance Account (PMA) which have previously been offset by revenue savings across the Neighbourhoods directorate. The overspend against this budget in 2019/20 was £1.200m. The MHCLG return currently assumes that it will be possible to reduce this by half as services will return to normal from August and will be able to begin the review of this. If this is not possible, the remaining budget pressure will be **£0.600m**.

Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT)

- 3.3 SCT have recently agreed their MTFP which includes savings across the next 3 years, £2.600m were planned to be delivered in 2020/21. The MHCLG return currently includes some SCT pressures relating to both direct Covid-19 related costs and the inability to reduce placements as planned due to the current circumstances. In addition to this there is estimated to be a further budget pressure of approximately **£0.378m** for the remainder of the financial year. Further work is required to understand how much of the £2.600m planned savings are unachievable.

Children's Services – Post 16 Service

- 3.4 Savings of **£0.250m** in the Post 16 Service are currently included in the 2020/21 budget which are now thought to be unachievable. The service also has approximately £2.000m of grant funding which may be at risk if it is not possible to achieve the associated outputs this financial year.

Children's Services – SEND Home to School Transport

- 3.5 The overspend against SEND Home to School Transport for 2019/20 was approximately £2.700m. The MHCLG return currently assumes that this will reduce to **£1.350m** as it will be possible to continue the project to address this from August. However, in reality the pressure is unlikely to be reduced

significantly during 2020/21. There is a possibility that the costs of this service will actually increase if children have to be transported separately due to social distancing measures.

Resources – Templink

- 3.6 There are financial pressures associated with payments to Templink staff which amount to **£0.360m** until the end of September and that have not been included in the MHCLG return.

Resources – Legal

- 3.7 Funding has not yet been identified to cover the costs of the newly formed Governance team. It is now unlikely that it will be possible to identify savings across the Resources directorate to fund this team. The cost of this team is **£0.290m**.

Resources - ICT

- 3.8 There has been a growing pressure on the recharge income for printing within the ICT budget. This pressure has significantly and quickly increased with the majority of people currently working from home. This should be offset by a reduction in expenditure across other service areas and a review of this will need to be undertaken and potential budget virements actioned to address this. However, it is possible that the corresponding savings are not able to be identified and therefore this could be a budget pressure for the council overall. The estimated pressure against this area is **£0.940m** if savings are not able to be identified across the rest of the council.

Oracle Replacement Project

- 3.9 The replacement of the Oracle system was due to be implemented on 1 September 2020. This has now been delayed until 1 April 2021 and the additional costs of this are currently estimated as **£0.158m**.

Capital Programme

- 3.10 An initial review of the council's capital programme has not identified any significant current issues. However, the following risks/issues have been highlighted: -
- Delays in progressing schemes although grants can generally be carried forward.
 - Potential for premiums being charged as contractors will be in demand when able to continue and will have additional H&S measures.
 - Major projects – Covid-19 is a Force Majeure event and therefore risk passes to council.

- School Basic Need funding for 2022/23 still to be announced and uncertainty around whether future allocations will take into account potential additional costs of temporary accommodation to allow social distancing in schools?
- Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – 30/40% delay in programme especially new build so spend will be pushed back into next financial year. The department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) are currently indicating an 8% reduction in March figures for availability of labour and 4.3% increase in costs for 4th quarter.
- HRA – Issues relating to the time limits for completion of Right to Buy applications.
- Local Transport Plan – some funding is time limited and therefore could be at risk unless deadlines are extended.

Summary – 2020/21

3.11 The table below summarises the financial pressures outlined above, including the shortfall calculated from the MHCLG return: -

Pressure	£m
Shortfall per MHCLG return	2.807
Property Maintenance Account	0.600
SCT	0.378
Post 16 Service	0.250
SEND Transport	1.350
Templink	0.360
Legal	0.290
ICT	0.940
Oracle Replacement Project	0.158
Total	7.133

3.12 The council’s free balances at the end of 2018/19 were £12.105m which is equivalent to 5% of the net expenditure budget and is in line with the policy to hold balances of between 3-5%. If these pressures are required to be funded from free balances, these would reduce to £4.972m which is equivalent to 2% and is below the prudent level set out in the reserves policy. It would also limit the council’s ability to deal with ongoing pressures that are likely to result from the expected economic downturn.

4 LOOKING AHEAD – 2021/22 ONWARDS

Potential Contract Increases

- 4.1 Most contracts due to expire in the current calendar year are being extended for a period of up to twelve months where the Service Manager confirms this is appropriate and contract performance is acceptable. This has enabled procurement resources to be directed towards dealing with the impact of Covid-19. Extension of existing contractual arrangements best protects the council's financial interests. The overall value of contracts ending in the current year is £10.200m.
- 4.2 In the medium to long- term, it is likely that we will continue to experience issues in tendering and the achievement of value for money. Lack of face to face engagement could be detrimental to pre-market engagement and any market contraction that has occurred is likely to mean that prices increase, and potential suppliers limit the number of tender processes to which they commit resources. The impact of this on costs is not easily quantifiable.
- 4.3 Contracts that have been extended in 2020 will need to be retendered alongside the existing planned tendering for subsequent years which will create a pressure on resources in the Procurement team and across the council. In addition, there will be inflationary increases, above the amount included in the council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy, as suppliers seek to recover the loss of inflationary increases for those contracts extended in the current year.
- 4.4 An additional pressure could come from scarcity of commodities such as building supplies and electronic components which would have an impact in the construction industry and ICT hardware respectively. There is already some scarcity in both areas, and it should be expected that materials costs in these fields will increase.
- 4.5 Price falls in the oil market and reduced investment might also have a negative impact on markets in terms of supplier engagement with tender processes and increased costs that suppliers will pass on to contracting authorities.
- 4.6 There is also the impact of Brexit that will need to be considered. If the UK reverts to World Trade Organisation terms at the end of 2020 and tariffs are imposed in some industries, this could have a further impact on contract costs.

2021/22 Budget Pressures


- 4.7 The majority of the budget pressures highlighted earlier in the report are likely to continue into 2021/22 although further work is required to quantify the impact in that year.

- 4.8 There are also new budget pressures that are likely to arise as a result of planned activity not taking place during 2020/21. Examples of these are: -
- The increased workload for the Procurement Service as a result of contract extensions in the current year will mean additional capacity is likely to be required in the team at an approximate cost of **£0.060m**.
 - A planned restructure of the Revenue and Benefits Service may not take place this year. Savings of **£0.295m** had been included in the MTFS relating to this restructure and therefore may not be achieved.

5 LOOKING AHEAD – NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 The closedown process for 2019/20 is close to completion. This means that the General Fund balance will be confirmed. It will then be necessary to review the earmarked balances and reserves that are committed from this balance and assess whether any of these can be redirected towards Covid-19 pressures.
- 5.2 The Finance Service will be working closely with the Service Improvement team to understand the Reset and Recovery process for the council. As part of this, it is vital that the plans for Reset and Recovery are affordable within the reduced financial resources that are likely to be available.
- 5.3 The Local Government Finance Settlement is not expected until later in the financial year and it is still not clear whether this will be another one-year settlement or a multi-year settlement. In the meantime, the funding for 2021/22 onwards will need to be estimated and the Leadership Team will need to agree various assumptions on which this should be based.
- 5.4 With the current level of uncertainty, it may be necessary to produce best, middle and worst-case scenarios. This will allow for plans to be made around Reset and Recovery for each of these scenarios and for these to be put into action quickly once the funding position is confirmed.
- 5.5 A decision will also need to be made about what level of risk the council is willing to accept when setting the budget for 2021/22 i.e. the level of contingency incorporated into this budget and therefore the potential for a call on reserves if the budget that is set is insufficient.

SHORT REPORT	
Subject Matter	Business Support Grant Update and Discretionary Business Grant Fund Policy
Lead Officer	Sue Knowles Head of ICT and Revenues and Benefits
Date	26 th May 2020
Decision	To note the progress made in awarding the Business Support Grants. To Approve the Discretionary Business Grant Policy.



Introduction

On 1 May 2020 the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) has introduced a new Discretionary Grant Fund and want Local Authorities to commence making payments at the beginning of June 2020. In order to achieve this our discretionary policy needs to be in place.

1 REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 At the end of March 2020, in response to Covid-19, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) introduced Business Support Grants aimed at helping small businesses (SB) and businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure industries (RHL).
- 1.2 This report provides an update on the progress made in making grant payments.
- 1.3 On 1 May 2020 the BEIS announced a Discretionary Grant fund as it had become clear that a number of small businesses affected by the pandemic had not met the criteria for the SB and RHL grants.
- 1.4 Guidance on the Discretionary Grant Scheme was received from BEIS on 13 May 2020. The guidance details qualifying criteria for the discretionary scheme and stipulates that the council must publish their scheme.

1.5 This report seeks approval of the Discretionary Business Support Grant Scheme which is included in Appendix 2a.

2 **BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS**

2.1 The BEIS launched SB and RHL grants at the end of March 2020.

2.2 Sandwell received funding of £73.036m from the BEIS who encouraged local authorities to make swift payment of the grants.

2.3 The BEIS have published weekly performance tables detailing the progress local authorities have made in making grant payments. The league tables are ranked based on the percentage of allocated funding paid out in grants which in no way reflects the work a council has put into ensuring eligible businesses receive the grants.

2.4 This report provides an update to the Emergency Committee on progress in administering the grant applications.

2.5 The BEIS launched a new Discretionary Grant Fund on 1 May 2020 and this report is seeking approval of Sandwell's Discretionary Business Grant Scheme Policy (appendix 2a).

3 **THE CURRENT POSITION**

SB and RHL Grants

3.1 Since the business support grant scheme was announced in March 2020 Sandwell has been working hard to administer the grants and encourage as many businesses as possible to apply.

3.2 We initially estimated that 5,887 business had potential entitlement to a grant. This was made up of:

- 4,897 eligible for a £10,000 SB grant
- 432 eligible for a £10,000 RHL grant
- 558 eligible for a £25,000 RHL grant

3.3 We identified that we held bank account details for only 4% of businesses and quickly awarded 236 grants to these at the beginning of April 2020. At the same time, we wrote all other businesses informing them of the grant scheme and to make an application using the online form we had created.

- 3.4 In addition to writing to businesses we also publicised the grant scheme through our website, social media, Business Improvement District Administrators and our Business Growth Team.
- 3.5 As the business rates system was not able to handle the grant awards an internal process involving the business rates team, the finance team and internal audit was agreed. The process includes a spotlight check, carried out by our Audit Team, of all applications received prior to passing for decision. Spotlight is a risk assessment tool provided by BEIS.
- 3.6 One of the issues faced by Sandwell is the high volume of small businesses in the borough. These businesses are not liable to pay business rates and there is no legal obligation for them to report their occupancy to the Local Authority. This means that a large proportion of the information we hold is out of date/inaccurate.
- 3.7 As at 24 April 2020 only 40% of businesses had applied for a grant. 3 teams were mobilised and attempted to contact 3,618 businesses to encourage take-up. The businesses that were not contactable by telephone were e-mailed where possible. Since commencing this proactive take-up campaign, an additional 2,183 grant applications have been submitted.
- 3.8 The take-up campaign has now concluded, and the results have been analysed. There was no response from 777 businesses and 116 have confirmed that they do not wish to claim a grant. This indicates that 15% of the original estimate of eligible businesses do not require a grant.

3.9 The current position is as follows:

• Applications received	=	4,994
• Applications determined	=	3,686
• Applications outstanding	=	1,308

Grants awarded:

• £10,000 SB grants	=	2,934
• £10,000 RHL grants	=	168
• £25,000 RHL grants	=	305

Total = 3,407 grants paid totalling £38,645,000

From the information above 68% of the applications received to date have been paid and proactive work continues to encourage take-up.

- 3.10 To process grants as quickly as possible the resource working on grants was increased. The applications currently outstanding are those that are

either in query or those where further information from businesses is yet to be supplied.

- 3.11 In many cases businesses have changed hands and there is no record of the new business now applying for a grant. These applications can only be determined by members of the team who have experience in business rates and will naturally take longer to verify and process.
- 3.12 In addition to processing grant applications the same resource also worked on awarding the new expanded retail relief and nursery relief. Sandwell completed this work by the end of April 2020 with a total of 1,188 businesses being awarded 100% relief. These businesses have been billed confirming their nil balance for 2020-21.
- 3.13 The BEIS have provided funding for all grant schemes. New burdens funding will also be provided to cover the cost of administration.
- 3.14 Sandwell will receive Section 31 grant funding to cover 100% of the cost of expanded retail relief and nursery relief.

4 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 The BEIS requires councils to publish their Discretionary Business Grant Scheme. Any approved scheme will be published on the council's website.

5 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS

- 5.1 The SB and RHL grants are one-off payments therefore the work will be completed once all applications have been determined.
- 5.2 The discretionary grants are one-off payments and funding of £3.362m has been provided by BEIS for these grants. Total grant payments must not exceed this amount.
- 5.3 Grant payments will help businesses survive the impact of the pandemic which directly impacts the wealth of the borough and helps to keep people in employment.

6 APPENDICES:

Appendix 2a – Discretionary Business Grant Scheme Policy 2020/21



**Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Business Rates**

Discretionary Business Grants Scheme Policy

2020/21



Meeting Ambitions 9 and 10

Ambition 9



Sandwell has become a location of choice for industries of the future where the local economy and high performing companies continue to grow.

Ambition 10



Sandwell now has a national reputation for getting things done, where all local partners are focused on what really matters in people's lives and communities.

1. INTRODUCTION

The current Coronavirus pandemic in the UK has resulted in many businesses suffering financial hardship.

On 1 May 2020 the Secretary of State for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) announced that it was providing local authorities with additional funding to target small businesses with high fixed property related costs which are not eligible for the current Small Business Rates (SBR) and Retail, Hospitality and Leisure (RHL) grant schemes.

Sandwell will receive funding of £3.362m to provide discretionary grant payments to businesses.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPALS

The BEIS has confirmed that only small businesses or micro businesses will be eligible for a discretionary business grant. In addition, businesses must have been trading on 11 March 2020 and must not be in administration, insolvent or had a striking-off notice served against it.

Small businesses are defined as:

- Having a turnover of no more than £10.2m
- Having a balance sheet total of no more than £5.1m
- Employing no more than 50 people

Micro businesses are defined as:

- Having a turnover of no more than £632,000
- Having a balance sheet total of no more than £316,000
- Employing no more than 10 people

The BEIS has asked councils to use their local knowledge and discretion to award discretionary grants to businesses but has stipulated that priority should be given to applications from the following:

- Small businesses in shared offices or other flexible work spaces, e.g. industrial parks, science parks, incubators etc. which do not have their own business rates assessment;
- Regular market traders who do not have their own business rates assessment;
- B & B's which pay Council Tax instead of business rates; and
- Charity properties in receipt of charitable business rates relief which would otherwise have been eligible for Small Business Rates Relief or Rural Rate Relief.

Only one discretionary grant is payable per businesses. Sandwell is committed to helping as many businesses as possible through this discretionary scheme. Therefore, as well as considering grants from the above Sandwell will consider applications from any other business that needs financial support because of the pandemic.

Businesses currently eligible for the existing SBR grant or RHL grant are ineligible for a discretionary grant payment.

3. AMOUNTS PAYABLE

The BEIS will provide a fixed level of funding for this scheme. Sandwell will receive £3.362m to provide discretionary grant payments.

The scheme is therefore cash limited and when grants have been awarded up to this amount no further grant applications will be successful.

The BEIS has confirmed that grants may be paid in amounts between:

- Any amount up to £10,000; or
- £25,000

Sandwell will determine the amount awarded taking account of:

- The circumstances of the businesses
- The impact the pandemic has had on that business

- The social value the business brings to the borough
- The difference receipt of a grant would have on the sustainability of the business

As this is a cash limited scheme the number of applications received may also affect the amount awarded.

The payment will be made from the council's SBS financial system and will be made directly to the businesses bank account via an electronic transfer (BACS).

4. THE APPLICATION PROCESS

An online application form will be made available on **www.sandwell.gov.uk**

Businesses will be asked to provide evidence to support their application and the online facility will enable them to upload documents.

The application form will gather all the information required to satisfy the eligibility criteria set by the BEIS and locally to determine the amount of grant payable.

As this is a cash limited scheme there will be a 4-week application window in which businesses can apply. Applications received outside of this window will not be considered.

5. PUBLICITY

To maximise take-up the council will publicise the scheme using a variety of media, including the council's website and social media. We will work with all interested parties to achieve this.

A copy of this policy statement will be made available for inspection and will be posted on the Sandwell Council website **www.sandwell.gov.uk**.

6. DECISION MAKING PROCESS

All grant applications received will be considered by a panel of council officers.


In all cases, applicants will be notified of the decision in writing.

7. OVERPAYMENT AND FRAUD

The council will seek to recover grants found to be overpaid.

The council is committed to identifying and subsequently investigating suspected fraudulent claims made under this scheme. Businesses who falsely declare their circumstances will have committed a criminal offence, which may lead to criminal proceedings being instigated.

SHORT REPORT	
Subject Matter	Support for Elderly and Vulnerable Residents
Lead Officer	Alison Knight, Executive Director – Neighbourhoods Stuart Lackenby, Director of Adult Social Care
Date	27 th May 2020
Decision	To note the progress made in in supporting Elderly and Vulnerable Residents.



1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an update to the Emergency Committee on the council's response to supporting vulnerable/shielding people in our communities who are unable to leave their property due to the increased risk to them if they were to contract COVID-19.
- 1.2. It summarises how vulnerable people have been identified and the support that has been put in place to assist them during the current crisis.

2. Background

- 2.1. On the 24th March 2020 the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government issued guidance outlining the need for a partnership approach between national and local agencies to support those people in our communities who are at the highest risk of severe illness ('the clinically extremely vulnerable') if they contract COVID-19 and therefore have been advised to isolate themselves ("shielding") for a period of time.
- 2.2. Shielding is designed to protect people from serious illness as well as help manage the current demand being experienced by the NHS. There are three strands of support being offered people who need to shield and do not have a close network of support available to them:
 - Food: delivery of basic food parcels directly to people's doorsteps
 - Medicines: provision of prescription medication delivered by community pharmacies.

- Social contact: local authorities, working with the voluntary and community sector, providing social support to people who might be feeling isolated at this difficult time.

2.3. Whilst the introduction of shielding aims to identify and support people within communities who will require help and support due to their current and recent medical history, the council also recognises the ‘shielding list’ does not identify everyone who either may be vulnerable or those who may require support and assistance during this crisis. We have therefore identified a local authority vulnerable-risk group to sit alongside the information we receive from the NHS about people who are currently shielding and those who are identified as high risk.

2.4. In identifying our vulnerable group, we used information from council departments such as Adult Social Care, Revenues & Benefits and Neighbourhoods & Communities and identified those at most risk by risk factors such as age group, location and specific vulnerability factors we are aware of. The data used to identify our vulnerable group, when combined with the shielding group identifies **23,227** people in Sandwell. Within this overall number there are people identified on the shielding data set who have also been identified within our vulnerable group. This total number of people however fluctuates as new people are added to the shielding list or where people are removed.

Group	Number of Residents
Shielded group	12,618
Vulnerable group	10,609

3. Update on proactive work with Vulnerable and Shielding residents

3.1. Whilst Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government guidance around Shielding is centred around reactive support to vulnerable/Shielding people, the council took forward a range of proactive measure to ensure that the most vulnerable people in our communities knew how to get in touch with the council if they needed help and understood the support available.

3.2. Since the introduction of the approach and we have reached out to both the ‘Shielding group’ and our ‘Local Authority vulnerable group’ as follows.

- Two separate letters have been sent to every household in Sandwell (**135,400 households**) advising them of the Councils emergency contact numbers, email address and available support. These letters also directed people to Government guidance on COVID-19
- A Further targeted letter was sent to **28,000** households in Sandwell who had a person over 70 living at the address that was registered with a local GP.

- A 60-strong team, made up from redeployed Council officers has proactively contacted **18,012** of the local Shielding/Vulnerable Group with the remaining **people** to be contacted by mid-June 2020.
- Where contact details for a potentially vulnerable person have not been available a “door knocking exercise” has been undertaken to identify the support needs of these individuals.

3.3. This proactive work has resulted in the following outcomes being taken forward for all contacted residents;

- Confirmation that no further support is required at this time
- Referral for Practical Support for urgent essential supplies – **678** people
- Referral for urgent Care and Support – **165** people
- Support from the community and voluntary sector – **1021** people

3.4. Once the remaining **people** have been contacted, the council will then solely focus on its reactive response to support vulnerable residents. Whilst shielding individuals will receive a follow up call to offer “a buddying service” for the remainder of the requirement to shield. The need for further proactive work will be reviewed in the context of potential future Government Guidance and how the COVID-19 pandemic progresses.

4. Update on reactive work with Vulnerable and Shielding residents

4.1. The role of the council to support people within the Shielding group has been significantly expanded through subsequent Government guidance that has resulted daily in the council receiving the following data, requiring response;

- People registering for a food package through 101
- New people added to the shielding list who have registered for support on the Governments website. This can be either urgent food requirements or the need for care and support.
- People on the Shielding list who the Government have been unable to contact.

4.2. The council is currently receiving the details of around **40** new residents daily. The council's response to this data is consistent with that provided through the councils proactive approach. The reactive approach is also supporting residents who contact the council because of its proactive correspondence and calls to local vulnerable people.

5. Sourcing and ongoing delivery of Food Parcels to vulnerable/elderly residents and those contacting the Emergency Helpline

- 5.1. Where it has been identified a resident is in urgent need of essential supplies, referrals have been made to the “Central Hub”, who are able to arrange for the provision of a basic package of food and household essentials to be supplied.
- 5.2. As set out in the Emergency Committee report of 14th April 2020, a significant number of employees from across the council have come together to help with packaging of food and deliveries at the Tipton Sports Academy.
- 5.3. By 21st May 2020, we had delivered 7608 parcels to those in need. Since the last report in April, parcels have also been delivered to 359 children with the equivalent of a free school meal each day.
- 5.4. In addition, food parcels are being provided to 150 vulnerable families identified by schools and 20 households living in temporary accommodation have been supported with small parcels of essentials every 2 weeks.
- 5.5. The referral process has been streamlined, enabling food parcels to be distributed within 2 hours, if not sooner. Weekend cover is provided via Community Alarms and they will deliver parcels to residents in need.
- 5.6. There has been an increase in issues relating to the delivery of government parcels - the council is now getting 6-8 specific referrals a week. These can range from parcels not being delivered, parcels being left in communal areas rather than at specific addresses and parcels being delivered that have been cancelled. These issues continue to be raised with the supplier and MHCLG. However, there is some risk that local residents feel these issues relate to the Council’s Food Hub.
- 5.7. Substantial amounts of stock is being issued to four food banks across the borough; West Bromwich, Smethwick, Brushstrokes and Baking Bread Wednesbury. This is food that has been purchased by the council and donated by local organisations.

6. Support to residents through volunteer support services with SCVO and the voluntary sector community offer.

- 6.1. Through either proactive or reactive contact, vulnerable/shielding residents who require ongoing support have been referred through for support from the voluntary sector. SCVO had placed 287 volunteers as at 18th May 2020, 61 volunteers for the befriending service and provided support for a further 673 people via the Community Offer.
- 6.2. The **Good Neighbours** scheme – provides additional support for residents who under normal circumstances would be perfectly able to lead an independent life and would not need on-going support from the council if they did not have to shield or self-isolate. 145 volunteers (as at 18th May 2020) are providing on-going practical help with shopping, staying in touch (by phone or online), dog walking, picking up prescriptions etc, until the coronavirus emergency is over.

6.3. **Sandwell Together befriending service** - this enables people to keep in touch by phone or Facetime. The service is primarily for people who are socially isolating (either short term or for the duration of the emergency). This includes vulnerable people in care homes where contact time with family has been reduced. Contact can vary from:

- a regular short call to keep in touch and check that things are ok
- longer chats to pass the time of day and reduce social isolation

61 volunteers are participating and supporting local people as part of the befriending service. A positive example is given below:

6.4. In addition, a number of volunteers have been placed with local foodbanks and some with the NHS volunteer scheme.

6.5. **Community Offer** - this offer is provided in partnership with a number of voluntary sector organisations and provides additional support for residents who may be vulnerable and at risk and have on-going needs where a range of support will help them to manage their situation to cope for the duration of the emergency. Teams of community-based staff provide a range of practical support for Sandwell residents and in addition will support both the Enhanced Assessment Beds and Hospital discharge where required. As at 18th May 673 people were being supported via this route.

6.6. Through the range of schemes available, the voluntary sector has been effective in providing ongoing support to around **1021** residents.

7. ONGOING RISKS

Below are key ongoing risks associated with the council's support to Vulnerable/Shielding Groups.

7.1. Data and guidance from MHCLG continues to be inconsistent requiring considerable validation before work is taken forward. Recent guidance from MHCLG identified a set of over 20 outcomes which MHCLG proposed that councils retrospectively apply to activity undertaken. For Sandwell this means revisiting 1800 individual records. Over 90 councils have made representations to the government challenging this expectation.

7.2. Whilst all residents identified as being “shielded” or in the wider “vulnerable” group will have been contacted via telephone or at their premises, there is always a risk that some may be uncontactable and may not receive support.

7.3. As the council considers its Reset and Recovery plan, there is need to maintain the capacity of the welfare agents supporting vulnerable/shielding groups for the forthcoming months. As council services exit the response phase, officers redeployed as welfare agents and in the food, hub will return to their substantive roles potentially


resulting in the council being unable to deliver against the Governments guidance on support to shielding residents.

- 7.4. Whilst there is still a risk that supplies may run low at the Food Hub, the council has now agreed bulk orders with a smaller number of approved suppliers, although some items are still in limited supply.
- 7.5. Cost of Food Hub and Foodbank support –at present overall costs of food continue to average at about £30,000 per week. This does not include the cost of stock being stored at Tipton Sports Academy.
- 7.6. Keeping residents and volunteers as safe as possible: When Sandwell Community Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) match a resident to a volunteer they will reinforce the message that the resident is being supported by another resident and the checking process that has been undertaken. The resident can contact SCVO if they are not happy with the arrangement. They will give a similar message to volunteers. Volunteers are given guidelines on social distancing, hand washing, limiting travel and what to do if they have a concern about a resident. Volunteers are not expected to enter a resident's house or take their bank details; the council continues to reinforce this message with residents to limit risks associated with scams and doorstep crime.
- 7.7. Volunteer capacity has the potential to be significantly reduced if the Government accelerates the reduction of its furlough scheme.

8. NEXT STEPS

- 8.1. Review the continued need for the food hub with Summer approaching, there will still be a need to support vulnerable families. Clearly the food hub location will need to be reviewed if Government guidance re. leisure centre closures are eventually relaxed.
- 8.2. Continue to monitor numbers of referrals into Good Neighbours, Community Offer and Sandwell Together: The number of repeat calls into the council's emergency helpline will be monitored and a case management approach will be adopted to tailor the support offered. The number of emergency food parcels will continue to be monitored.
- 8.3. Continue to respond to requests for support from residents alongside both vulnerable and shielding individuals.
- 8.4. Continue dialogue with MHCLG on a practical and effective outcomes framework.
- 8.5. Factor any continued support into the Reset and Recovery Plan.

SHORT REPORT	
Subject Matter	Personal Protective Equipment
Lead Office	Nicola Plant, Service Manager
Date	28 May 2020
Decision	To note the current position .



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Covid-19 generated an unprecedented demand on the PPE supply chain and a slow down in manufacturing in affected countries. This report provides an overview of PPE supply management by the council.

2. KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 A government supply route was established to support emergency requirements. This operates via Local Resilience Forums. Sandwell has been receiving PPE drops from the government via the West Midlands and Warwickshire LRF. The content and quantity of these drops have been varied and there have been disparities between supply and demand.
- 2.2 The supply is aimed at two broad categories: Social Care and Primary Care. Local authorities are required to manage the PPE needs for social care and Clinical Commissioning Groups manage the supply to primary care.
- 2.3 At the beginning of April, 90% of the supply was provided for social care with 10% allocated to primary care. This has recently changed and from the beginning of May the allocations changed to 75% to social care and 25% to primary care.
- 2.4 Stock levels are monitored and returns on stock and usage levels are provided three times per week.
- 2.5 There have been some challenges with the government supply of some items relating to expiry dates and CE markings. The council has been actively working with the LRF to seek the correct assurances on these items prior to usage.
- 2.6 We have based our management of PPE supplies on the three strand approach set out in the governments Covid-19 PPE Plan; Guidance, Distribution and Future Supply. Our approach is:-
- i. Guidance: providing advice and guidance to ensure staff and providers are clear who needs PPE and when based on national clinical guidelines. This

ensures workers on the frontline are safe but also makes sure PPE is only used when clinically necessary and not wasted.

- ii. Distribution: establishing a PPE store from which PPE is distributed where it is needed.
- iii. Future supply: forecasting future demands and working with procurement, the LRF and neighbouring authorities to develop future supply chains.

2.7 The largest items of PPE demanded are face masks and gloves with an average daily distribution (from 06/05/2020) of over 500 masks and over 3000 gloves. The majority of these supplies have been distributed to the Adult Social Care sector, internal and external including residential, nursing and domiciliary care providers. Some provision has also been made to Funeral Directors, Children's social care and school services to meet urgent need.

2.8 The national benchmark for PPE supply is to have sufficient supplies to meet 7 days usage. Currently, based on average and forecast usage the council supplies exceed this benchmark. It is therefore considered we currently have sufficient supplies of PPE to meet our needs.

2.9 Systems are in place to monitor and manage the fluctuating demand on PPE stock levels which can be affected by a number of issues such as levels of transmission and changes to guidance on the usage of PPE.

2.10 Over recent weeks the council has established a strong supply chain and will continue to utilise the relationships that have been established to respond to demand in this area.


2.11 PPE will continue to be an issue over coming weeks and the Council will do whatever it can to ensure that sufficient supply is available to meet demand.

3. Next steps

3.1 We continue to develop our own supply chains for PPE and are working with both Wolverhampton and a consortium co-ordinated by Birmingham City Council to secure supply routes.

3.2 As easement progresses we are aware that there may be further demands on the supply chain for PPE as other services start to operate and we will continue to monitor this.

SHORT REPORT	
Subject Matter	Adult Social Care Infection Fund Ring Fenced Grant 2020
Lead Directors	Stuart Lackenby, Director of Adult Social Care Lisa McNally, Director of Public Health
Date	27 May 2020



1. Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of the Adult Social Care Infection Fund Ring Fenced Grant 2020 and requests Emergency Committee approval for the Director of Adult Social Care in conjunction with the Director of Public Health to administer the Adult Social Care Infection Fund Ring Fenced Grant 2020 in line with Government guidance as set out in this report.

2. Adult Social Care Infection Control Fund

- 2.1. In Sandwell there are 86 care homes registered with CQC which provide 2223 beds to people with care and support needs. These include people funded by Sandwell Council, other Councils and self-funders.
- 2.2. The council and its partners are providing considerable support to care homes to help reduce coronavirus infections, manage outbreaks and maintain sustainability. Despite this support there has been considerable media attention in recent weeks on the impact of coronavirus in UK care homes.
- 2.3. On the 22 May 2020 the Department of Health and Social Care published the Local Authority Circular 'Adult Social Care Infection Fund Ring Fenced Grant 2020'. The circular provides details on the Governments, Adult Social Care Infection Control Fund worth £600 million nationally. Sandwell's allocation of this fund is £2.8 million.
- 2.4. The primary purpose of this fund is to support adult social care providers, including those with whom the local authority does not have a contract, to reduce the rate of coronavirus transmission in and between care homes and support wider workforce resilience. A small percentage of it may be used to support domiciliary care providers and support wider workforce resilience to deal with coronavirus infections. This funding will be paid as a Section 31 grant, ring fenced exclusively for actions which support

care homes and domiciliary care providers mainly to tackle the risk of coronavirus infections and is in addition to funding already received.

- 2.5. The Grant will be paid in 2 equal instalments;
 - Payment 1: May 2020 – Payment 2: July 2020
- 2.6. To receive the second instalment, authorities must have returned a Care Home Support Plan by 29 May 2020. Residential care providers, will also be required to have completed the governments Care Home Capacity Tracker at least once and be committed to completing the Tracker on a consistent basis to be eligible to receive funding. The payment of the second instalment is contingent on the first being used for infection control measures and being used in its entirety.
- 2.7. The Circular requires local authorities to pass 75% of each month's funding to care homes within the local authority's geographical area on a 'per beds' basis, including to social care providers with whom the local authority does not have existing contracts.
- 2.8. The local authority has the discretion to allocate the remaining 25% of the funding to domiciliary care providers and to support wider workforce resilience in relation to coronavirus infection control. However, no payments should be made unless certain conditions are met, including the local authority being satisfied that the funding is being used for infection control purposes. Clawback provisions apply, including that the provider must repay any amounts not used for infection control measures.
- 2.9. The infection control measures expected to be implemented through the funding are clearly defined in the grant circular. Providers must provide the Local authority with a statement certifying that they have spent the funding on those measures by the 23 September 2020.
- 2.10. Locally the Council and its Health partners support offer to care homes is well established and includes considerable infection control support to both care homes and domiciliary care providers. In line with the Local Authority Circular requirements a copy of the Councils Care Home Support Plan, will be signed off by the Chief Executive through the Councils Statutory Officers meeting by 29 May 2020 and submitted to the Department of Health and Social Care.
- 2.11. The Sandwell Care Home Support plan will meet all the requirements of the Infection Control Grant and will, subject to provider compliance, as defined in the circular passport 75% of the grant to care homes in Sandwell on a 'per beds' basis. The remaining 25% will be passported to Domiciliary care providers contracted with the Council or funded through Sandwell Council provided direct payments, again in line with requirements of the Grant. Domiciliary care allocations will be based on the numbers of hours delivered by the domiciliary care provider to Sandwell residents.

3. Recommendation

- 3.1. Emergency Committee approve the Director of Adult Social Care in conjunction with the Director of Public Health to administer the Adult Social Care Infection Fund Ring Fenced Grant 2020 in line with Government guidance as set out in this report.