

<i>REPORT TO:</i>	Scrutiny Commission
<i>SUBJECT:</i>	Organisational Recovery post COVID-19
<i>LEAD OFFICER:</i>	Simon Jackson
<i>CABINET LEAD MEMBER:</i>	Cllr J. Morgan
<i>ORIGIN OF ITEM:</i>	The Scrutiny Commission of 1 June 2020 resolved that a single substantive agenda item for each meeting concentrates on one of the recovery cells as listed in the report of the Chief Executive 'COVID-19: Council approach to community, economic and organisational recovery'.
<i>BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE</i>	To provide the Commission with more detail on the approach to organisational recovery.

1. Executive Summary

1.1 At its meeting on 1 June 2020 the scrutiny commission received a report from the Chief Executive outlining the impact of the COVID – 19 outbreak on the financial and operational position of the Council. In addition, Scrutiny Commission was advised of the actions taken to respond to the emergency and begin the recovery for the Community, Economy and Organisation.

1.2 The Organisational Recovery Cell is internally focussed and was established with the following scope:

- A focus on the 'switching back on' of all services in a controlled managed way taking full account of the current and changing government guidance and advice from Public Health England
- Establishing processes to prepare the organisation for the recovery phase including people, processes, technology and infrastructure

1.3 The work programme of the Organisational Recovery Cell (ORC) has naturally divided into two elements:

- Response – switching services back on
 - Service recovery and development - enabling the sustainable delivery of services in the medium and longer term; a key aspect of this work is to ensure opportunities arising from outbreak of COVID-19, such as the experience of widespread and successful homeworking, are not lost.
- 1.4 The initial response of the Council to the COVID-19 outbreak, whilst not completely seamless, can be regarded as very successful. Obviously, the response and contribution of all staff is the principle contributor to that outcome. However, the response was greatly facilitated by the Council's ICT infrastructure, and the way that the ICS team was able to swiftly enhance this to enable widespread home working in short order. Similarly, the contribution of the property and health & safety professionals was very significant in allowing staff to get back to work both within the various office environments and out visiting customers.
- 1.5 Work continues to allow staff to deliver services in a safe way, informed by emerging government guidance, but increasingly, the work of the ORC is focussed on medium and longer term ways of working, under key themes which include:
- Agile working
 - Digital transformation
 - Accommodation
- 1.6 This agenda is now starting to pick up actions that were planned within the Corporate Strategy and Business Plan, and moving forward it is envisaged that ORC activities may become embedded within 'business as usual', with potentially a return towards the structures existing pre-COVID-19.

2. Response phase

- 2.1 As noted in previous reports at the start of the pandemic, the Council's focus was on 'response' which was informed by the Local Resilience Forum through the activation of emergency plan processes. Internally, the critical activities dealt with the organisational impact of the closure of the Council buildings, moving most employees to remote working. In addition, arrangements had to be made to protect those staff who were still operating in residents' homes, most specifically the housing repairs team, which has continued to respond to emergency repair requests throughout, but also other staff who often work outside of Southfields, such as the various enforcement teams.

- 2.2 A sense of the work required in this immediate recovery phase can be gathered from the work programmes for the ORC and the Health & Safety working groups attached at Appendices A and B respectively.
- 2.3 The detail of the work is set within the work programmes but as flavour, the overarching ORC group has co-ordinated general activities including:
- Identification of capacity of safe working limits for Southfields and other council buildings
 - Mapping out the buildings ensuring safe social distancing can be achieved
 - Applying physical markings to the buildings showing desk availability and people flows
 - Establishing a protocol for the use of kitchens and toilets
 - Enhanced cleaning regimes
 - Providing PPE
- 2.4 Other matters addressed included:
- Detailed visiting protocols (housing repairs service, enforcement officers, etc)
 - Consideration of what is 'urgent'
 - Communication with customers
 - Opening of the customer service area
 - Liaison with partners
 - Specifying and ordering additional safety screens
 - Access controls
- 2.5 The Health & Safety Working Group's: contribution was critical in enabling safe working. Key contributions included:
- Identifying vulnerable staff
 - Performing an array of risk assessments (an activity that remains very much 'live')
 - Consideration and actions to protect staff well being
 - Making sure that staff had the correct equipment at home to undertake their work, including chairs, screens and IT equipment

- Continual review of the Government COVID-19 guidelines, which changed on a daily basis, to ensure all Risk Assessments and staff advice was up to date
 - Liaising with the Learning & Development Team to create an on-line induction course for staff returning to offices
 - Protocols enabling use of meeting rooms
 - Making physical Council work places safe (including mobile locations)
 - Ensuring provision of fire wardens and first aiders remains adequate
 - Recording COVID-19 Secure sign-off for each of the buildings following an inspection by the H&S officer providing assurance to public or staff visiting the buildings
 - Consulting with Trade Unions
- 2.6 Although the initial crisis has passed much work remains for the Health & Safety Working Group, as more Council buildings are brought back into use (most recently the museum), and further requirements are identified around assessment of Display Screen Equipment for staff to ensure staff health is maintained as homeworking is extended.
- 2.7 One positive arising from the COVID-19 outbreak has been the ability of the Council's ICT infrastructure to adapt and support homeworking on an extensive basis, with the vast majority of Council staff enabled for homeworking within days of the lockdown occurring. It goes without saying that the contribution of the ICS staff was critical in making this happen.
- 2.8 At the heart of this success was the advanced status of the MSOffice 365 roll-out containing the MSTeams application that enables remote collaboration and sharing, combined with the video calling functionality for multiple users. It is perhaps sobering to reflect that even two or three years ago, the ability to support homeworking was much less sophisticated than is now the case.
- 2.9 Another area of success has been the Council's ability to implement virtual meetings, both internal and public using MSTeams and Zoom applications. Individuals will have experienced glitches from time to time but that has to be considered in the context of such meetings being impractical or even impossible just a few months ago. Alongside the ICS team, Democratic Services staff are also due credit for making this happen.
- 2.10 Finally in this section it is necessary to remark on the work of the communications team – effective communications, both internal and external has been a very significant part of the Council's success in responding to the COVID-19 outbreak, and no doubt this will continue

to be the case as the Council moves through recovery and into the 'new normal'.

3. Service recovery and development

- 3.1 The latter sections of the ORC Work Programme is being updated on an ongoing basis and outlines planned activities under the themes of Ways of Working, Council Accommodation and Developing a sustainable Council.
- 3.2 The **Ways of Working** theme picks up work around the nascent People Strategy, including the complex subject of Agile Working, and the development of the skills that Council staff will need going forward.
- 3.3 Agile working refers to the ability to work flexibly both in terms of time and location (always subject to business need). Agile working will allow – through increased home or remote working – the reduction of the Council's office space but implementation requires detailed consideration of matters such as ICT provision and HR policy.
- 3.4 Ways of Working also covers the digital agenda and aims to pick up strands within the Online Customer Experience project; in this area the objectives are to both enhance customer experience and create operational efficiencies through new technology.
- 3.5 Closely related to the digital strand are the plans to develop the Council's ICT capability. Key initiatives here include: Group's contribution was critical in enabling safe working. Key contributions included:
 - Introduction of major back office systems that will enable the complete roll-out of MSOffice365 across the whole organisation
 - Development of a 'hybrid' meeting capability – enabling meetings where there is a mix of virtual and 'in-person' attendees
- 3.6 The **Council Accommodation theme** will ultimately consider the best use of all Council properties including Southfields, Limehurst Depot and the business units at the Oak and Ark.
- 3.7 This review of assets will not necessarily result in changes to their existing use or operations. However, in the case of Southfields it has already been established that the existing offices are not really fit for purpose (a view existing pre-COVID-19) and that a smaller, modern, more energy efficient office, designed to match new ways of working is required. Beyond this, little has been established with reference to Southfields - so some sort of refurbishment of the existing offices, a new office on the Southfields site, or an alternative office elsewhere in Loughborough all remain live possibilities.

3.8 ***Developing a Sustainable Council*** is closely aligned to the budget strategy which aims to reduce the Council's net costs. This theme links to the previous ones – by seeking to identify areas for service reviews - and to the Council's approach to addressing the financial challenges set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (an update of which is due to be presented to Cabinet in October and then Council in November 2020).

Appendices

<i>Appendix A</i>	<i>ORC work programme</i>
<i>Appendix B</i>	<i>Health & Safety Working Group action plan</i>
<i>Appendix C</i>	<i>Scrutiny Commission presentation</i>

Background Papers: None

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