

## STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

### Community Overview & Scrutiny Panel

27 July 2020

<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>COVID- 19 Pandemic - Community Recovery</b>
<b>PORTFOLIO HOLDER:</b>	<b>Councillor Mike Bowen - Portfolio Holder for Communities</b>
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Mark Forrester - Head of Democratic &amp; Community Services</b>
<b>WARDS INVOLVED:</b>	<b>(All Wards);</b>

#### 1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 The report outlines possible key social challenges and issues to consider in the recovery phase of the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### 2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That Members discuss the issues raised in this report.
- 2.2 That, on the basis of the report and the contribution of Members, officers will engage with partner organisations to formulate a draft Covid-19 Community Recovery Plan.

#### 3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 Staffordshire Moorlands District Council has established an officer group to develop a Covid-19 recovery plan across a number of themes one of which is designated as 'community recovery'. The initial scoping brief for the theme includes:
- Developing an evidenced based understanding of the impact on our local communities,
  - Understanding and planning for the impact on the support services that we currently provide,
  - Providing support and coordination to the local voluntary sector, community groups and other partners,
  - Developing community cohesion in respect of the response.
- 3.2 Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the lives of people with some groups of people impacted more severely than others and this leaves a legacy that

requires a policy response. Similarly the potential impact in the next phase of lockdown easing, and longer term impact is likely to be felt unequally.

- 3.3 Impacts have been felt by older and vulnerable people, children and young people, working households and specific communities. These include impact on health, education, jobs and income, the local environment and services people access.
- 3.4 There have been positive developments, particularly the way in which people have stepped forward as volunteers and “good neighbours”. The voluntary sector has played a critical role in supporting people and the Council has formed a closer working relationship with key organisations.
- 3.5 The question is raised about what the key issues are that the Council should think about as part of ‘community recovery’, whether there are particular groups of people that need to be prioritised in the short and medium term, and what the opportunity might be to work differently with the voluntary sector and other partners.
- 3.6 A series of steps are suggested, including the development of a basket of indicators to track the impact of the pandemic over the long term, engagement with the voluntary sector, key statutory sector organisations and use of current formal partnerships to coordinate the community recovery work.

#### 4. **How this report links to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 Aim 1: To help create a safer and healthier environment for our communities to live and work.

#### 5. **Alternative Options**

- 5.1 The report is presented with the purpose of promoting discussion to inform the scope of planning Covid-19 community recovery. Members are recommended to have that discussion.

Neil Rodgers  
**Executive Director (Place)**

#### **Web Links and Background Papers**

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#### 6. **Detail**

- 6.1 Staffordshire Moorlands District Council has established an officer group to

develop a Covid-19 recovery plan across a number of themes one of which is designated as 'community recovery'. The initial scoping brief for the theme includes:

- Developing an evidenced based understanding of the impact on our local communities
- Understanding and planning for the impact on the support services that we currently provide
- Providing support and coordination to the local voluntary sector, community groups and other partners
- Developing community cohesion in respect of the response

7.2 The purpose of this report is to highlight a number of potential elements to include in the Council's development of a community recovery plan with the intention to provoke discussion and encourage the input of Members. Drafting of this report involved a light touch review of current national thinking alongside discussions with Council Officers, voluntary sector organisations involved in coordinating local community support and the initial discussions which are part of the Staffordshire Resilience Forum recovery planning.

7.3 The key challenges and opportunities.

It is a statement of the obvious that Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the lives of people. It is also obvious that some groups of people have been impacted more severely than others and this leaves a legacy that requires a policy response. Similarly the potential impact in the next phase of lockdown easing, and longer term impact is likely to be unequally felt.

There are challenges ahead both as a legacy of what has happened and what we foresee happening but also potential opportunities and positive things that we can build on. The following are some initial ideas about the issues we need to consider:

7.3.1 Impact of lockdown on:

- Individuals – those who were shielded or advised to isolate, the wider 'vulnerable population' such as homeless people, people with poor mental health, children and young people.
- Children and Education - interrupted learning, social isolation and parental/carer stress. The impact on disadvantaged and vulnerable children; with limited access to online learning, accommodation that does not lend itself to learning, parents/carers less willing or able to help. There may be long-term impacts on positive engagement in education and absenteeism. When not in school, research suggests children are physically less active, have longer screen time, irregular sleep patterns, and less favourable diets. With the long absence from school these behaviours are likely to become more pronounced.

- Households – reduced incomes, relationship pressures, loneliness and loss of social contact, health issue – concerns about increased alcohol consumption.
- Services – access to public services reduced or switched to ‘on-line’, some voluntary sector support services reduced or stopped, there has been a growth of informal ‘good neighbour’ volunteering, new mutual aid groups and new volunteers.
- Social opportunities – loneliness and loss of social contact, stopping of recreational, sport, cultural opportunities, new on line groups and virtual community events.
- Health - The NHS is facing a mounting backlog of non-Covid patients whose treatments have been delayed. Preventative services and management of some existing long-term conditions has been put on hold. Delays in diagnosis and treatment are likely to impact on mortality rates. Some people have embraced changes and exercised more and quit smoking. Whilst conversely there are reports of increasing alcohol consumption and weight gain.
- Environment – increased in fly tipping, increased use of local green spaces.
- Crime - new forms of ASB (breaking lockdown), concerns about increased child sexual abuse and domestic abuse
- Leadership – many councillors have been active in local support groups and actively reporting local problems.
- New working relationship - partnership with key local voluntary and community groups and statutory agencies, switch to virtual meetings.

### 7.3.2 The current post lockdown phase

- Vulnerable people who need to continue a level of isolating or who feel afraid or less able to leave the house. Some of the informal ‘good neighbour’ support could fall away as volunteers return to work. As some social groups and other face to face social support won’t immediately pick up levels of social isolation and associated health problems could increase for this group of people.
- Increased poverty as a result of lost jobs and income, poor economic opportunity for young people, homelessness. (and associated problems – health, educational achievement, crime)
- Rural communities and neighbourhoods impacted by sudden significant increase in visitor numbers – with amenities (pubs, toilets etc.) not yet open or more limited. There is a degree of local resentment at the behaviour and number of visitors to certain locations.

- Crime and antisocial behaviour – there are concerns with pubs opening, but in more limited fashion, that there will be a spike in ASB.
- Legacy of mental health issues, relationship breakdown, domestic abuse.
- Social Cohesion – will new volunteers and groups continue or transform to address new issues. How do community and volunteer run services and facilities reopen (village halls, friendship groups, sports clubs etc.)?
- The level of demand for our services or those we work with – advice services for example could expect to see increased demand, demand on food banks has been increasing.

### 7.3.3 Medium term

- A key positive from the pandemic has been the surge in volunteering and social action. Existing and new mutual aid groups have been critical to the covid-19 response - small local groups, supporting one another, and their community. The vital role of charities and community groups has also been highlighted; having been the first line of support for some of our most vulnerable residents. However funding streams for key voluntary groups have been threatened with cuts and with public sector finance under significant pressure the long-term sustainability of the sector is at risk.
- Jobs, Employment and Poverty – There have been dire predictions about a return to 1980's levels of unemployment. The pandemic has and will continue to affect the poorest in society the most both in terms of being more likely to experience worse health outcomes from Covid-19, and from increased economic and social hardship during the lockdown, and during the economic fallout. Nationally there has been the largest spike in unemployment on record; research shows that such job loss is associated with increased depression, anxiety, distress, and low self-esteem and may lead to higher rates of substance use, domestic abuse, child neglect and suicide. The economic fallout could have persistent health effects; initial estimates suggest a 1% fall in employment could lead to around a 2% increase in the prevalence of chronic illness and it is likely to disproportionately impact those from less affluent backgrounds.
- National Policy – The Government's policy response in relation to economic regeneration and social programmes will be critical. Recent Government announcements have focused on economic recovery but if that recovery is not quick and the problems associated with poverty and deprivation become entrenched then significant social programmes are also likely to be needed. We need to be in a position to work with whatever policy response and associated financial support may be forthcoming.
- Towards a 'Green recovery' – encouraging new patterns of living, tackling climate change and a greater appreciation and more active volunteering in support of the natural environment.

- Our local voluntary and community sector – A review of the Council’s community support arrangements is already a corporate priority. There is now a new context for this review and consideration of whether the Council can strengthen its partnership and encourage an increased role and capacity for the voluntary and community sector organisations.
- Community priorities – given the major impact of Covid-19 on so many aspects of daily life the Council may need to consider whether community priorities have changed and whether expectations and attitudes to public services have changed.
- Commemoration – celebration: Will it be appropriate at some point to think about marking the events of the past year. The losses and the gains, the role of community volunteers.

#### 7.4 The Council’s response

A range of service responses have been delivered to support the local community through the Covid-19 crisis. Partnership via the Local Resilience Forum has been an important part of the response. In the context of community support and the future it is worth noting the way in which the Council has formed a close working relationship with the local voluntary and community sector. At the heart of that relationship has been the regular meetings and coordination of effort with Support Staffordshire, the Council and the three organisations (designated lead organisations with Staffordshire County Council) - Homelink, Biddulph Youth and Community Zone, and Haregate Community Centre. The Council provided a grant of £5,000 to each of these three organisations to help them undertake their community support role during a time when their usual source of income had been lost).

Councillors and Parish Councils have provided information on the community groups and initiatives which quickly established to support vulnerable people in their local communities.

The local voluntary and community sector has played an absolutely critical role in supporting people through this first stage of the Covid-19 crisis. Through the meetings with Support Staffordshire and Staffordshire County Council the issue of future community need, ‘recovery’ and how we work together has been raised.

#### 7.5 Target Groups

In organising a coordinated response during the next phase and medium term do we need to focus on particular groups of people and their needs?

- Older People/vulnerable - isolation and mental health
- Young people – worklessness and its long term impact.
- Working age families – poverty and its impact on health and wellbeing, domestic abuse, crime and ASB where poverty is concentrated.

Will we need to focus in particular places – could problems for our poorest neighbourhoods be compounded and so do we need a neighbourhood approach not just an individual/socio-demographic group approach?

## 7.6 Organisation

The voluntary and community sector has been critical in the first phase of response. There have been more volunteers, including more informal neighbour support, additional resources, including funding, have been used to address the challenges.

Do we need to renew our relationship and formal partnership structures to work with the voluntary sector on the challenges ahead? Can we help sustain the new voluntary effort?

The Biddulph Youth and Community Zone, Hargeate Community Centre and Moorlands Homelink have acted as key 'anchor organisations' – key characteristics of these are organisations: they have paid staff and formal systems of management and governance, they have a broad beneficial purpose (not just one demographic client group) they have premises, they have an ability to work in partnership with others, they have networks with many other voluntary and community organisations and are trusted. Is the partnership we have something we can build on as we seek to meet the challenges ahead.?

Do we need to think about, develop and share the value base that informs activity going forward. So for example think about the difference between voluntary activity which (1) has people as the passive recipients of other people's 'charity' or which (2) engages people as participants in community life.

## 7.7 Themes

Are there some key themes or areas of voluntary /community sector action:

- Good neighbours – building community
- Food – without other significant policy changes we can expect to see an increased demand on food banks, community cafés
- Digital inclusion – access and helping people to develop confidence and skills.

## 7.8 Steps

- Engage Members – to help scope the issues we should focus on and the potential at community level.
- Develop a basket of indicators and intelligence to track the impact on our community of the pandemic over time and to inform our actions. It is proposed to form a basket of indicators drawn from externally available data, data generated from the Council's Services and that available from partners –such as the Health Service, County Council, CAB, and Foodbanks.

- Explore with key people/organisations the possibilities. (Support Staffordshire, the 'anchor organisations', the wider voluntary sector engagement and consultation, County Council and health service).
- Gain a broad agreement about the focus of our efforts and the underpinning values and approach.
- Engage with partner organisations in the recovery phase – County Council, Health Service and Police Service – through the established partnership structures (Resilience Forum, Community safety Partnership).