
SBC COVID PANDEMIC RECOVERY PLAN

Report by: Executive Director Economy & Improvement

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

27 May 2021

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the Covid-Recovery Plan for Scottish Borders Council.**
- 1.2 Following a range of necessary measures aimed at protecting the safety of customers, communities and SBC Staff, the majority of Council services are now operating to levels close to full service delivery. Some of these services are being delivered using alternative models, whilst other remaining services are being restarted as restrictions ease and Government guidelines allow.
- 1.3 In addition to Council services, there is the opportunity to build on the experience of the pandemic to work jointly with partners and re-invigorate the Scottish Borders as a place to live, work & visit. This is the primary purpose of the Recovery Plan.
- 1.4 Our Corporate Plan includes actions aimed at reshaping and improving our services, delivering improvements to our economy and improving the quality of life and well-being for our communities. The Recovery Plan does not replace our Corporate Plan; instead the proposal is that the Recovery Plan picks up the immediate recovery actions (for the coming 12-months) and that the SBC Corporate Plan, when renewed and refreshed, fully incorporates these, and more, within it.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 I recommend that Scottish Borders Council:-

(a) Approves the 12-month Recovery Plan.

(b) Agrees that the experience of the pandemic and a number of the lessons-learned be applied to delivery of the Fit for 2024 Programme.

3 COVID – EXPERIENCE, RESPONSE & OPERATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

3.1 As a result of the Covid-pandemic restrictions were put in place, many of which impacted the delivery of Council services. During this time, a number of services broadly continued to operate (with extra safety measures, staffing resources); some services continued but with significant changes to the delivery model; and a small number of services have been suspended.

3.2 Some examples of this are shown below:-

Continued (broadly unchanged)	Description
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste services • Care at Home • Residential care homes 	Services continued but with increased safety measures in place (PPE etc....), minimisation of contact and utilisation of staff from other areas (e.g.) other Council departments, Live Borders to supplement the 'normal' workforce.
Significant Change	Description
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What Matters hubs • Social Work and OT assessments 	<i>Face-to-Face contact suspended and replaced by telephone and 'Near Me' virtual consultation</i>
Service suspended	Description
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buildings based and face-to-face services suspended 	Some services alternatively provided via digital methods and community provision

3.3 On top of changes made to existing services, new services were initiated to respond to the pandemic. In March 2020, Scottish Borders Council created Community Assistance Hubs (CAHs) within each of our five localities. The role of the Hubs was to use multi-disciplinary teams to maximise community capacity to meet the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. There were two parts to the Hubs;

1. Community Support
2. Health and Social Care support.

3.4 Community Support was the single point of contact for people who were elderly or vulnerable, with the aim to minimise potential hardship caused by isolation or difficulties in accessing essential food, medical supplies or appropriate information. Health and Social Care support teams worked closely with the Community Support teams to ensure that delivery of essential care was met by nursing and care at home staff/providers.

3.5 An example of the Community Support team representation for Teviot hub is shown below. As can be seen, it is a collective mix of staff, volunteers and community resource coming together to deliver essential services during very challenging times.

Burnfoot Community Futures Citizen's Advice Bureau Food Train Health in Mind LAC – Older Adults, MH, LD Red Cross Salvation Army Samaritans SBC staff, Joint Health Improvement Team
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- 3.6 At various stages during the pandemic, Education services were impacted, with schools and nurseries being closed at times to all but the most vulnerable via Education hubs.
- 3.7 Lockdown restrictions meant that the reopening of schools from August 2020 had to revert to a blended approach in January 2021 which saw large numbers of pupils once again learning from home using iPads and applications such as Glow and MS Teams. School capacities were significantly reduced to ensure that social distancing could be maintained for those pupils who did physically attend school.
- 3.8 Throughout this, the Council's Inspire Learning programme was vital in supporting and delivering high quality in-school and at-home learning. The Programme was rolled out pre-Covid to all secondary pupils and a number of primary years. This timely and progressive approach to learning was of crucial importance for Scottish Borders pupils having access to learning resources and experiences during the pandemic.
- 3.9 The majority of office-based Council staff have worked from home throughout the pandemic. This has required everyone adapting not only to home-working, but also to utilising the technology to make this work. A major barrier to home-working pre-Covid was the number of physical face-to-face meetings that people had on a weekly basis. Technology such as MS Teams has existed for years, but the workplace 'norm' pre-Covid was that meetings took place in a physical room – often requiring travel and catering arrangements. The adoption of MS Teams for meetings (across SBC and also Health) has proved to be incredibly useful in reducing printing of meeting papers, travel expenses, travel time and meeting time. It has also removed barriers to people being able to attend therefore increasing participation in meetings.
- 3.10 SBC has used a flexible deployment approach to target staff resource at the areas of greatest need. As well as ensuring that services were resourced, this gave opportunities for staff to do new things and to work in areas outside their normal remit.
- 3.11 At the outset of the Covid pandemic, SBC initiated two separate officer Boards (Corporate & Education) to allow decisions to be taken regarding the operation or pausing of services, overview of safety measures/equipment, the deployment of staff and financial resources, and other key issues facing the Council. This has been consolidated into one Response and Recovery Board, which acts as the Corporate focal point for the co-ordination of all key decisions regarding the safe operation or re-start of services.

4 SBC RECOVERY PLAN

- 4.1 In regard to Council-services, the Covid-restrictions necessitated changes to our 'traditional' service delivery model. It also presented opportunities:
- to do things differently and to work more closely with our communities and partners to deliver necessary services in a different way.
 - for staff to volunteer to work in areas outside of their core roles.

- to utilise the available technology in ways that had not been done previously.
- 4.2 These drivers will help inform future service delivery. The purpose of the Recovery Plan is to pick up the immediate recovery actions for council services and the Borders-wide priority actions for the coming 12-months. The Recovery Plan (*Appendix 1*) is fully aligned to our Corporate Plan. The intention being that the upcoming renew and refresh of our Corporate Plan incorporates the Recovery Plan.
- 4.3 Ongoing engagement with our communities, partners and staff is critical moving forward. SBC needs to needs to understand what is most important to various key stakeholders and build priorities and services around this. An example of this, already being planned, is the range of summer activities SBC are developing for children and young people with partners such as Live Borders and Youth Borders. This programme will be developed and shared with families; and schools will be working to identify young people who would particularly benefit from these experiences. Furthermore, this will seek to seek to recruit young people to be employed in supporting the delivery, offering valuable employment experience and income opportunities.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial

The financial implications of COVID-19 during 2021/22 will continue to be closely monitored and reported through the Executive Committee. The financial impacts of COVID-19 during 2020/21 provides the basis to inform forecasting this financial year. The 2020/21 outturn information will be used to inform and influence the monitoring of the 2021/22 budget and the 2022/23 financial planning process. The benefits of more effective ways of working, implemented effectively during the pandemic, will continue to be deployed during 2021/22 to minimise additional costs wherever possible whilst maximising income opportunities.

5.2 Risk and Mitigations

The pandemic highlighted risks and mitigations for our services. We worked though those by adapting what we were doing and introducing new ways of doing things and new services. The pandemic will inform how services are delivered into the future and service risk assessments will continue to be completed and uploaded to the Lexi system.

5.3 Integrated Impact Assessment

Tackling inequality is one of the key identified areas for the Recovery Plan and an integrated impact assessment (IIA) will be completed as part of the process to deliver the new Corporate Plan.

5.4 Sustainable Development Goals

A key aspect of the Recovery Plan is to continue to meet SBCs corporate sustainable development goals as part of the recovery process.

5.5 **Climate Change**

Climate Change is a priority for SBC and also is a specific area of focus within the Recovery Plan

5.6 **Rural Proofing**

This will be undertaken as part of the process to deliver the new Corporate Plan. However, whilst rurality may pose recovery challenges for the Scottish Borders, it could also be viewed as having been an asset during the pandemic, particularly if technology can be harnessed to reduce isolation and increase accessibility.

5.7 **Data Protection Impact Statement**

There are no personal data implications arising from the proposals contained in this report.

6 **CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 Members of Corporate Management Team (CMT), the Executive Director (Finance & Regulatory), the Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Service Director HR & Communications, the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have been consulted and any comments received have been incorporated into the final report.

Approved by

Name
Title

Signature

Author(s)

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Background Papers:

Previous Minute Reference:

Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Jason McDonald can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

Contact us at jamcdonald@scotborders.gov.uk

Appendix 1: SBC Recovery Plan
(**separate file**)