

<b>Report To:</b>	<b>COVID-19 RECOVERY SCRUTINY PANEL</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>27 JULY 2021</b>
<b>Heading:</b>	<b>COVID-19 RECOVERY</b>		
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	<b>NOT APPLICABLE</b>		
<b>Ward/s:</b>	<b>ALL</b>		
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>NO</b>		
<b>Subject to Call-In:</b>	<b>NO</b>		

### **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to present the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel with an update in relation to the Council's COVID-19 recovery actions and up to date Government COVID-19 guidance and restrictions.

### **Recommendation(s)**

COVID-19 Response Scrutiny Panel Members are recommended to:

- a. Note the information contained in this report, including the latest COVID-19 guidance and restrictions and service area updates.
- b. Identify key recovery themes to explore as part of the work programme of the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel.
- c. Consider and approve any recommendations to be made to Cabinet at the September meeting.

### **Reasons for Recommendation(s)**

The COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel has been established to ensure the Council has robust recovery arrangements in place.

### **Alternative Options Considered**

No alternative options have been considered.

## **Detailed Information**

*Note: Following the Annual Council Meeting, the name of the Panel was changed from the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel to the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel to align with the shift in focus of the Panel's work.*

## **GUIDANCE AND RESTRICTIONS UPDATE**

Please see below some details of the roadmap out of lockdown developed by the Government, as well as the move into step four of the roadmap in England and what that means practically for Ashfield residents, businesses, and the Council.

### **Vaccinations and Roadmap Development**

In February 2021, as part of the Government's COVID-19 Response, a roadmap was developed setting out how England will move out of lockdown.

Vaccines have been at the heart of the Government's strategy to manage COVID-19, as the UK deployed an ambitious vaccination programme. As of 19 July 2021, in England, 38,863,810 people have received a first dose of vaccine. 30,213,335 have received a second dose, giving a cumulative total of 69,077,145 to date.

In chapter 3 of the roadmap, the Government sets out four steps for easing restrictions. Before proceeding through the steps, the Government examined data available to assess the impact of the previous step, with these four key considerations:

- The vaccine deployment programme continues successfully
- Evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths in those vaccinated
- Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations which would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS
- Government's assessment of the risk is not fundamentally changed by new Variants of Concern

From the 19 July, England has moved to Step 4 of the COVID-19 roadmap out of lockdown, as set out by the Government. Everyone should remain cautious while managing the risks as cases of COVID-19 remain high.

### **Step Four of the Roadmap**

While cases are high and rising, everybody needs to continue to act carefully and remain cautious. The following key protections will remain in place at step four:

- Testing when you have symptoms and targeted asymptomatic testing in education, high risk workplaces, and to help people manage their personal risk.
- Isolating when positive or when contacted by NHS Test and Trace
- Border quarantine – for all arriving from red list countries and for those people not fully vaccinated arriving from amber list countries

- Cautious guidance for individuals, businesses, and the vulnerable while the prevalence is high including:
  - Whilst Government is no longer instructing people to work from home if they can, Government would expect and recommend a gradual return over the summer
  - Government expects and recommends that people wear face coverings in crowded areas such as public transport
  - Being outside in fresh air
  - Minimising the number, proximity, and duration of social contacts
  - Encouraging and supporting businesses and large events to use the NHS COVID Pass in high risk settings. The Government will work with organisations where people are likely to be near others outside their household to encourage the use of this.

Following England moving to step four of the roadmap out of lockdown, the Government released this further guidance regarding restrictions being lifted:

“Although most legal restrictions have been lifted at step four, and many people have been vaccinated, it is still possible to catch and spread COVID-19, even if you are fully vaccinated, and we are still in the third wave of the pandemic in the UK.

COVID-19 will be a feature of our lives for the foreseeable future, so we need to learn to live with it and manage the risk to ourselves and others.

As COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, it is important that we all use personal judgement to manage our own risk. All of us can play our part by exercising common sense and considering the risk. While no situation is risk free, there are actions we can take to protect ourselves and others around us. Following this guidance will help you stay safe and protect others by controlling the spread Every action to help reduce the spread will reduce any further resurgence of the virus in the coming months”.

### Lifting Restrictions

Most legal restrictions to control COVID-19 have been lifted at step four. This means that:

- You do not need to stay 2 metres apart from people you do not live with. There are also no limits on the number of people you can meet
- However, in order to minimise risk at a time of high prevalence, you should limit the close contact you have with those you do not usually live with and increase close contact gradually. This includes minimising the number, proximity and duration of social contacts
- You should meet outdoors where possible and let fresh air into homes or other enclosed spaces
- The Government is no longer instructing people to work from home if they can. However, the Government expects and recommends a gradual return over the summer
- The requirement to wear face coverings in law has been lifted. However, the Government expects and recommends that people wear face coverings in crowded areas such as public transport

- There are no longer limits on the number of people who can attend weddings, civil partnerships, funerals, and other life events (including receptions and celebrations). There is no requirement for table service at life events, or restrictions on singing or dancing. You should follow guidance for weddings and funerals to reduce risk and protect yourself and others
- There are no longer restrictions on group sizes for attending communal worship. COVID-19 has not gone away, so it's important to remember the actions you can take to keep yourself and others safe. Everybody needs to continue to act carefully and remain cautious.

## Businesses and Venues

All remaining closed businesses and venues such as nightclubs and adult entertainment venues are able to reopen. All capacity limits at sporting, entertainment, or business events have been lifted.

Hospitality venues such as pubs, restaurants and bars are no longer required to provide table service or follow other social distancing rules.

All businesses should follow the principles set out in the working safely guidance. Whilst the Government is no longer instructing people to work from home if they can, the Government would expect and recommend a gradual return over the summer.

Employers still have a legal duty to manage risks to those affected by their business. The way to do this is to carry out a health and safety risk assessment, including the risk of COVID-19, and to take reasonable steps to mitigate the risks you identify. Working Safely guidance sets out a range of mitigations employers should consider including:

- cleaning surfaces that people touch regularly
- identifying poorly ventilated areas in the venue and taking steps to improve air flow
- ensuring that staff and customers who are unwell do not attend the workplace or venue
- communicating to staff and customers the measures you have put in place.

We encourage organisations in certain settings to use the NHS COVID Pass as a condition of entry, in order to reduce the risk of COVID-19. This will especially be the case in large, crowded settings (such as nightclubs) where people are likely to be in close proximity to others outside their household.

To support organisations and individuals in these settings, the NHS COVID Pass will be made available through the NHS App, NHS.UK, or as a letter that can be requested by ringing NHS 119. Visitors will also be able to show text or email confirmation of test results. Organisations should ensure they are in compliance with all legal obligations, including on equalities.

There are some settings where the NHS COVID Pass should not be used as a condition of entry, in order to ensure access for all. This includes essential services and essential retailers which have been able to stay open throughout the pandemic.

Businesses are also encouraged to continue displaying QR codes for customers wishing to check in using the NHS COVID-19 app, or to continue collecting customer contact details to support NHS Test and Trace, however this will no longer be a legal requirement.

## SERVICE AREA UPDATES

Please see below a series of updates provided across several service areas of the Council in relation to COVID-19 recovery. These updates have been provided by:

- Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services
- Corporate Finance Manager (and S151 Officer)
- Team Leader, Commercial and Environmental Protection
- Service Manager, Neighbourhoods and Environment
- Health and Wellbeing Manager
- Town Centres and Markets Manager

## Collection Rates and Grant Payment Information

### Collection Rates

	2019/20		2020/21	
	£m	%	£m	%
Council Tax	64.357	97.05	65.940	95.85
Business Rates	37.339	97.95	27.584	95.40
Council House Rents	24.244	99.27	24.232	99.82

NB: The £10m reduction in Business Rates between 2019/20 and 2020/21 was paid as Rates Relief as shown in the Table below.

### Business Rates Reliefs

	2020/21		2021/22 (Est)	
	£m	No. Businesses	£m	No. Businesses
Retail Relief	9.839	511	5.152	431
Nursery Relief	0.139	20	0.113	20

## Business Grants

	<b>Grant Type</b>	<b>Grant Value</b>	<b>£m</b>	<b>No. Grant Awards</b>
Phase One	Small Business Grant	£10k	13.960	1,396
	Retail Hosp. & Leisure Grant	£10k	1.180	118
	Retail Hosp. & Leisure Grant	£25k	3.300	132
	Discretionary Grant	Various	0.846	91
Subsequent Phases (To date)	Local Restrictions Grant / Lockdown Grant / Restart Grant	Various	11.287	4,621
	Additional Restrictions Grant	Various	4.099	2,366

Total Covid Grants and Reliefs to support Businesses since the start of the Pandemic = £49.915m

## Council Tax Hardship Payments

	<b>2020/21</b>		<b>2021/22 (Est)</b>	
	<b>No. Awards</b>	<b>£m</b>	<b>No. Awards</b>	<b>£m</b>
Hardship Payments	3,086	0.478	1,662	0.216

This Hardship Payment represents payment of up to a maximum of £150 for those households who are already in receipt of Council Tax Support but who do still have to pay towards their Council Tax.

## Test & Trace Payments

	<b>Main Scheme</b>	<b>Discretionary Scheme</b>
Applications Received (To date)	509	918
Applications Paid	335	136
Applications Refused	174	782
Amount Paid (£k)	£167k	£68k

Budget Remaining (£k)	£45k	£168k
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The Main Scheme is fully funded by Government and is for those in receipt of a qualifying benefit (e.g. Universal Credit, Job Seekers, etc). The Discretionary Scheme is for those not in receipt of a qualifying benefit with access to the grant determined by the local scheme which takes into account levels of earnings and savings.

#### Test & Trace Recent Applications – Trend since January 2021

Month	No. Applications
Jan 2021	356
Feb 2021	300
Mar 2021	120
Apr 2021	47
May 2021	21
Jun 2021	116
Jul 2021 (to 19/07/21)	192

#### **Environmental Health and Commercial and Environmental Protection**

Since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, the Council's Environmental Health team has been heavily involved in ensuring the safety of residents and businesses through proactively engaging with businesses on emerging regulations and also compliance with regulations during the pandemic.

They contacted over 900 food businesses to ensure measures and controls were in place to protect staff and customers from COVID-19 at the start of the pandemic and then as businesses closed assisted providing information to internal colleagues re: grants.

As businesses opened, they have worked with businesses across the district in providing advice and guiding and signposting business to secure compliance with the frequently changing regulations.

They have interpreted legislation and provided digital and hard copy advice and guidance leaflets for distribution to internal and external partners and customers and have intervened, where necessary, by issuing warning letters and final warning letters to persistently non-compliant business including a forced closure/ direction to close under coronavirus legislation of one premises in Hucknall. They also worked on outbreaks to ensure a large warehouse and additional postal businesses stayed open to serve the public.

They have worked tirelessly with Public Health England to provide safety advice to businesses in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The team have dealt with 2,439 requests for service from members of the public, commercial premises, and small and medium enterprises in the District of Ashfield – more than half of these were in relation to cv19 and concerns.

Requests for new food business information – people wishing to provide meals and food from home - have been higher than previous years. They have received 191 new food premises registrations, more than double previous time periods.

In order to protect public health and meet our duty of care and statutory functions, the team have continued to audit and inspect newly registered food businesses.

More recently the team have secured a dedicated officer for food until March 2022, who has been able to inspect outstanding higher risk premises from 2020 and will concentrate on all outstanding food inspections on a risk-based approach

In recovery, the team have employed a new member of staff through the CONTAIN fund who will continue to address COVID-19 queries and assist business in understanding the step 4 regulations and the guidance going forward.

It is hoped that inspections under the Health and Safety remit will now resume these include premises, animal welfare, breeding and boarding and massage and special treatment establishments. Health and Safety Officers have also been serving more than normal notices on empty and commercial premises which may be a direct link to a reduction in owners visiting premises during the last 18 months.

The team also have three vacant posts to advertise which once filled will assist with meeting statutory duties and protecting public health during the upcoming recovery period.

## **Neighbourhoods and Environment**

The Neighbourhood and Environment service continues to deliver all aspects of its services, this includes bin and clinical waste collections, bulky waste collections, street cleansing and street bin emptying, grass cutting and ground maintenance across the District.

Earlier in the year it carried out the BIG Spring Clean collecting over 8,000 bulky items from over 4000 households from across the District over a 3-week period.

Ashfield District Council is the only Local Authority that has continued to provide waste collections, as well other additional services such as the bag it campaigns and skip into the summer, uninterrupted since March 2021.

However, the current focus is on maintaining services against rising infection rates within the Community, combined with the increasing numbers of those being requiring to self-isolate due to track and trace. Many other Local Authorities are being required to reduce or postpone waste collections due to the lack of availability of staff, therefore the impact of COVID remains a significant risk for Ashfield.

## **Cemeteries**

The Council continues to maintain a full service with sickness within the team no longer impacting the delivery of burials. The expected demand on the service due to COVID did not materialise.



The focus for the service moving forward is managing any impact on staffing numbers from rising infection rates within the Community, combined with the increasing numbers of those being requiring to self-isolate due to track and trace.

## **Parks and Open Spaces**

After being initially closed playgrounds and park cars parks soon reopened.

There are no immediate concerns with restrictions having been lifted on the 19<sup>th</sup> July

## **Town Centres and Markets**

The COVID information officers, as part of their day to day work in our town centres disseminating guidance and support also circulated details of various government grants as they became available, including:

20.07.20 – Discretionary Business Grants scheme  
18.08.20 – D2N2 link to Government information  
18.11.21 – Coronavirus support for businesses  
15.01.21 – Coronavirus support for businesses  
16.02.21 – Coronavirus support for businesses  
28.04.21 – Business support on grant applications

With the ending of restrictions and subsequent decrease in the amount of guidance available for the CIO's after May 2021, the officer numbers have been reduced. We now have one Senior Covid Information Officer (Ian Rotherham) through to the end of September 2021, helping with any further queries from businesses and supporting the work being carried out through the Welcome Back Fund.

The Welcome Back Fund is a £114k, ERDF funding allocation – similar to the Reopening High Streets Fund, aimed at reinvigorating town centres, increasing footfall and subsequently confidence in the local community to use local facilities and support high street shops.

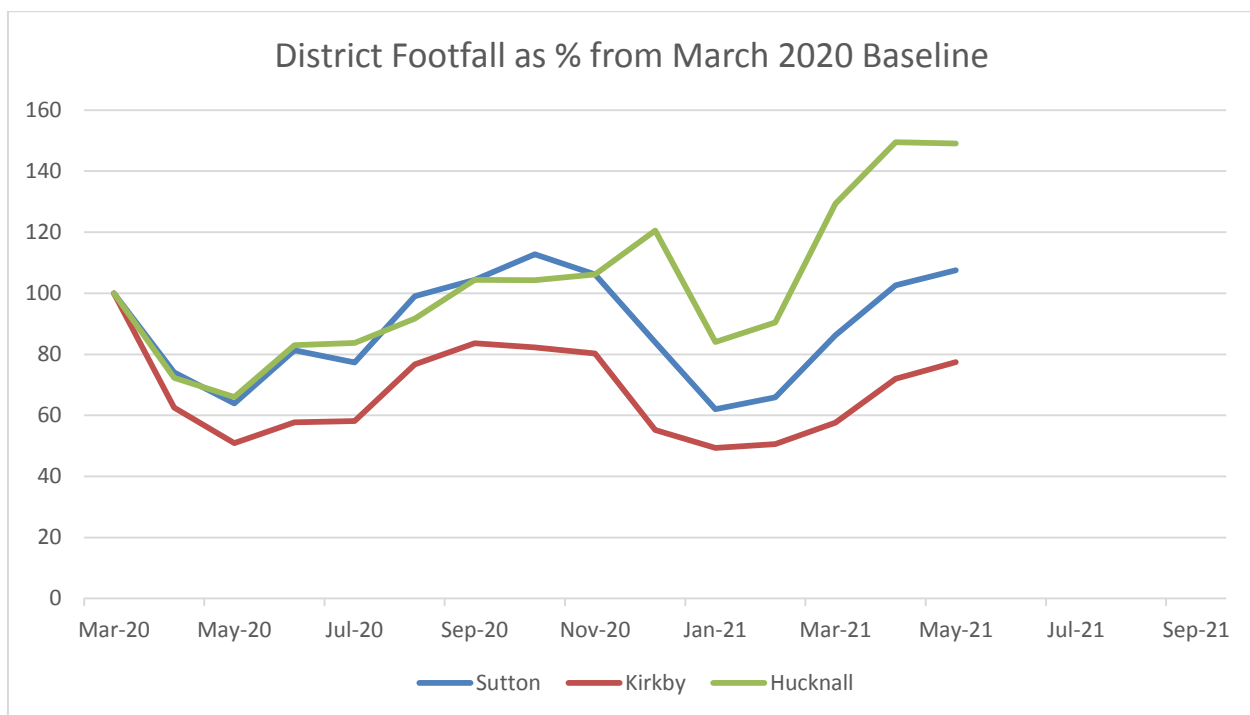
As part of this, we have developed a plan including but limited to:

- Create an Art Trail across the district, placing local art from schools, colleges, community groups etc into the public environment creating sites of interest and increasing dwell time.
- Following on from the successful 'Virtual Ashfield Arts Festival', the art works will include paintings, photography, the spoken word and promote historical events and people.
- Bring Music to the High Street with a string ensemble on Hucknall High Street each Thursday evening in August
- Promote local exhibitors across each town centre e.g. the bus museum in Hucknall and a Birds of Prey
- Support a new food festival in Hucknall
- Painting of columns and high street furniture in Sutton
- Employ street entertainers on market days
- Investigate the repair of Christmas tree brackets on the front of high street shops with the view of placing trees in over the Christmas period
- Improve flower displays

- Bring in a pavement scrubber to deep clean each town centre
- Repaint streetlights (Sutton) and street furniture e.g seating
- Install cross street bunting where possible
- Purchase smaller market stalls to allow traders to stand in areas where existing gazebos impinge on the highway
- Seek small fairground rides for town centre locations
- Promote participation events such as Zumba; line dancing etc
- Hold tabletop sales on market days at reduced rates
- Hold monthly plant fairs
- Seek Farmers markets operators

## Footfall

The funding will also be used to renew the footfall counting software we have for our three towns which we are using as a measure on how our town centre footfall declined and recovers in the new normal.

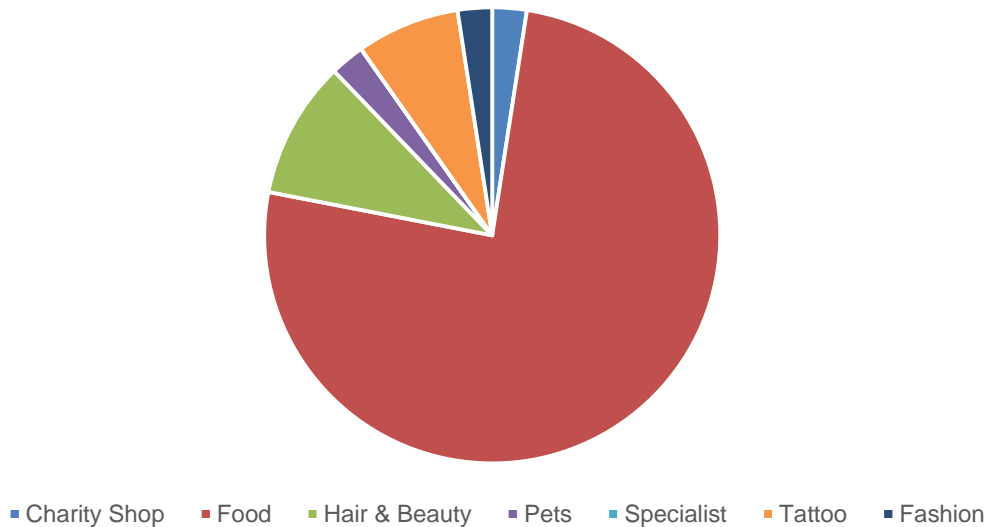


Interesting to note that with both Hucknall and Sutton have recovered to above pre COVID levels (the former significantly), Kirkby is yet to, though impact of Aldi being closed for renovation, cannot be ignored.

## Shops and retailers

With regard to the retail provision across the district we have seen a significant increase in the number of takeaway shops (31), with 52 new or repurposed shops overall:

## Change of use or new shop provision - 20/21



Overall comparing to figures from June 2020 to June 2021 are positive:

- An increase in retailers district wide - 1240 from 1188
- A decrease in the vacancy rate district wide 15% down to 10%
- A decrease in the vacancy rate for each town centre:
  1. Hucknall 8.6% to 6.2%
  2. Kirkby 14% to 12.5%.
  3. Sutton 18.6% to 13.5%

### Governance

Continued effective governance advice, support and delivery was essential during both the beginning of the Pandemic, throughout and as part of the Council's longer-term recovery plans. Establishing an additional Scrutiny Committee to consider response and recovery through the Pandemic has allowed not only all elected Members to engage in the process, discuss options and recovery with the Council's key officers but also local partner organisations.

As part of its considerations, the Covid-19 Response and Recovery Committee provided an effective forum for the local community and local businesses to not only discuss issues with key representatives but also work together to provide potential solutions to common problems. In June 2021 the Scrutiny Panel was renamed the Covid-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel, ensuring that the focus progressed to recovery plans and actions the Council and its partners will take to assist local communities and businesses into recovery.

All meetings of the Council were live streamed during the pandemic and whilst the legislation to allow virtual attendance at Council meetings has expired, lessons learnt throughout the pandemic have resulted in a refreshed look at accessibility to local decision making through technology for the local community. Virtual training on effective decision making and governance was provided by the Democratic Services / Scrutiny Team throughout and continues to be an effective tool to ensure the route through recovery is managed through good governance and Constitutional decision making.

The County, PCC, and District Elections held in May 2021 proved to be an enormous challenge for the Elections Team but demonstrated how even through the most trying of circumstances, a well-

run, efficient and effective local election could be delivered through the tenacity, dedication and hard work of all involved. Challenges included social distancing, PPE, accommodation and staffing, amongst others.

The Legal Team continue to provide a comprehensive and accessible service enabling the Council to continue receiving appropriate legal advice, support, and action.

Risk and Emergency Planning have played a pivotal role throughout the Pandemic, ensuring the Council can still deliver its services safely and putting the health and wellbeing of the community and Council staff at the forefront. They will continue to play a key role throughout recovery.

## **ASHFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL – RECOVERY STRATEGY**

As England moves in to step four of the roadmap, removing many of the restrictions that have been in place for much of the last 16 months, Ashfield District Council continues to focus on the importance of local recovery in all aspects. This has been reflected in the Council's Corporate Plan 2019 - 2023 which identifies national, regional, and local recovery aims.

Ashfield District Council is the only local authority in Nottinghamshire that has continued to deliver all tier 1 and 2 services without interruption during the pandemic. The whole organisation has worked effectively together as one council, re-deploying staff into important roles outside of their normal duties to ensure continuance of service, whilst also delivering humanitarian services across the district. The Council's local recovery plans align with both national and regional plans.

National recovery themes are focussed on:

### Health Recovery

Considering overall health outcomes, not just those directly caused by COVID-19.

### Economic Recovery

Protecting and restoring people's livelihoods and improving people's living standards. Considering the wider effect of the social distancing measures on how the public live their daily lives.

### Social or Community Recovery

Considering the wider effect of the social distancing measures on how the public live their daily lives.

Regional Local Resilience Forum Recovery Aims are to support the whole of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, including its communities, businesses, and public services, to recover following COVID-19.

As well as addressing the very real adverse impacts – the global scale of which have likely not been seen for decades - this will also mean striving to advance long term opportunities for better physical and mental health, tackling climate change, better health outcomes and supporting a sustainable, fast growing local economy.

Recovery planning and impact assessment is focussed on the following:

- Humanitarian Assistance (including Health)

- Economic
- Environmental
- Infrastructure

## **The Council's Local Recovery Aims**

To support and coordinate the process of rebuilding, restoring, and rehabilitating the emotional, social, economic, and physical wellbeing of the community, businesses, and the Council's employees.

Recovery will cover two main strands:

### Ashfield as a Place – Community and Economic Recovery

Supporting the community and businesses in achieving stability and a new normality following COVID-19, assisting in rebuilding, restoring, and rehabilitating the community's emotional, social, economic, and physical wellbeing; and

### The Council – Organisational Recovery

Assessing the impact of COVID-19 on Council services, finances and employees and planning for its future financial resilience and how it will need to operate differently. Appendix A demonstrates the Council's alignment of local recovery planning and corporate priorities.

## **Approach to Recovery**

Recovery needs to be done collaboratively with businesses, the community and Council employees.

This includes a collaborative approach through:

- Full engagement with communities, businesses, the voluntary sector, and Council employees, having conversations about the challenges ahead and ensuring that people are put first and that those most affected are not left behind.
- Provision of visible and strong leadership throughout the long road through recovery
- Co-ordination through the process of recovery ensuring local communities, businesses, and Council employees are provided with the required support.

Long term recovery will see the Council support and coordinate the process of rebuilding, restoring, and rehabilitating the emotional, social, economic, and physical wellbeing of the community, businesses, and the Council's employees.

Full details of the Council's Recovery Strategy actions are detailed in the Corporate Plan 2019-2023 attached as Appendix A.

## **Implications**

### **Corporate Plan:**

Details of how the work of the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel aligns with the Council's Corporate Plan 2019 – 2023 are detailed within the main text of this report.

**Legal:**

There are no direct legal implications resulting from the recommendations in this report. Panel Members will be examining changes in legislation regarding COVID-19 restrictions.

**Finance:**

There are no direct financial implications resulting from the recommendations in this report. Details of collection rates and COVID-19 funding are included within the report.

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	None.
General Fund – Capital Programme	
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	

**Risk:**

Risk	Mitigation
Not having robust COVID-19 recovery plans in place.	The COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel will work with key officers and partners to ensure robust recovery plans are implemented.

**Human Resources:**

There are no direct HR implications resulting from the recommendations in this report.

**Environmental/Sustainability:**

There are no direct environmental or sustainability implications resulting from the recommendations in this report.

**Equalities:**

There are no direct equalities implications resulting from the recommendations in this report.

**Other Implications:**

There are no other implications resulting from the recommendations in this report.

**Reason(s) for Urgency**

None.

**Reason(s) for Exemption**

None.

**Background Papers**

- Ashfield District Council Corporate Plan, 2019 - 2023

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