

ALLERDALE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COVID-19 RECOVERY STRATEGY

Summary

The COVID-19 crisis has had a significant impact across Cumbria and the focus to date has been on the immediate co-ordinated response to support the county during the lockdown period. Although this work will continue for some time, preparations are now underway to manage the phased opening up of the area, and to plan ahead for the longer term challenges that will begin to become clearer as we emerge from the lockdown period.

Our work for planning Allerdale's recovery must focus along four broad themes:

1. economic impact, support and recovery;
2. response and stabilisation of the virus pandemic and its impacts;
3. residents, communities and their health and wellbeing, and
4. impact on the Council including our services, transformation and financial security.

This work will be undertaken in a way which fully involves all stakeholders in the area in order to develop the best possible forward plans. While the strategic objectives identified in the Council Strategy 2020-2030 remain our overarching priorities, we must also develop a Recovery Strategy and Interim Delivery Plan that resets and repositions our focus to the post COVID-19 challenges and opportunities the borough of Allerdale now faces.

Introduction: The Need for a Recovery Strategy

Recovery planning is essential to drive the recovery phase of COVID19, to support Allerdale's residents, the economy and businesses, reform the delivery of public services and consider the financial resilience of the Council and how it will need to operate differently, learning the lessons from the pandemic.

To this end, we have established Allerdale Borough Council's Recovery Group to provide officer leadership to the strategic co-ordination and delivery of Allerdale's recovery response. Terms of Reference have been agreed.

Alongside our Recovery Strategy, we must prepare an Interim Delivery Plan that resets and repositions our focus to the post COVID-19 challenges and opportunities that Allerdale now faces. Arguably, the six strategic objectives set out in Allerdale's Council Strategy 2020-2030 – namely delivering a financially secure council, a cleaner and greener Allerdale, investing to grow, providing outstanding local services, thriving towns and villages and building resilient communities – are even more critical and everything we do as a council must continue to be aimed at improving the lives of our residents both now and for the future. Together, these documents will play a key role in shaping the future of the borough over the coming years.

Context and Scope

Our approach to recovery is critical to support Allerdale's residents, the economy and businesses during this rapidly changing situation. It will also enable reforms to be made to the delivery of public services across the region and for the Council to make sustained changes to how it operates internally. The recovery work will also include the financial

recovery required for the Council given the very significant impacts that the pandemic has had on the financial position of the Council.

The start-point and phasing of the recovery will be influenced by national policy decisions that the Government makes as the health crisis evolves over the coming weeks and months. It is critical that Allerdale starts to plan forwards now for the recovery phase at this time of national uncertainty, as well as continuing to deliver the immediate response phase effectively.

This document sets out the key principles that underpin Allerdale's approach to recovery and the broad strategic themes into which our recovery activity is grouped.

Those themes each represent a significant programme of activity that will have short, medium and longer term priority actions. There are important and multiple interdependencies between the activities within the themes. The ABC Recovery Group will co-ordinate that activity.

Principles

The principles driving Allerdale's approach to recovery are:

- **Aspiration** – Our approach to recovery must be ambitious and aspirational – we don't just want to return to normal but should seek to get to a place that was better than before. We can use the experience to modernise working practices, improve the customer experience, build closer working relationships with partners and drive a more resilient economy in the longer term.
- **Influence** – Our ABC Recovery Group must take an active role in influencing the regional approach as well as lobbying and shaping the national policy position so far as possible. We must work with Government, MPs, media, CLEP, county council and stakeholders/partners to ensure that we are provided with the support, funding and assistance we need to deliver priority recovery activity.
- **Delivery** – we will actively contribute to COVID-19 response and recovery for the benefit of Allerdale residents through provision of planning, housing and homelessness services, business support, licensing, environmental health, parks/leisure and digital services.
- **Intelligence** – Our approach to recovery will be based on intelligence gathered at a local level and will be place-based. Data will be used to compile impact assessments, build evidence and monitor/measure recovery activity.
- **Partnership** – We will work with partner organisations and agencies to ensure that our residents and businesses receive the support they need for recovery. We will aim to make recovery sustainable in the long term by integrating with existing structures (LEP, Community Safety Partnership, Allerdale Local Focus Hub, Allerdale Health and Wellbeing Forum) rather than create a standalone Strategic Recovery Unit just for this purpose.
- **Transformation** – we will build on our success in the response phase of the pandemic to ensure that we manage and develop new ways of working and a culture

that will allow us to continue to provide excellent levels of customer service and modern working practises that survive beyond recovery and into the 'new normal'.

Allerdale's Strategic Themes

The elements of recovery are complex and far reaching across all aspects of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a district council, we must not only consider our approach to recovery within our own organisation but also for our residents, communities, businesses and our ability to influence the wider health legacy for the area.

We will, therefore, group our approach to recovery along four broad themes:

1. Economic impact, support and recovery

This work includes immediate work such as supporting local businesses and employers as well as stabilising the local economy. However, we must also develop a strategy that is ambitious and aspirational that will allow for stimulation and development of a more resilient, inclusive and green economy in the longer term. The Council must fulfil its role as leader and influencer in assisting businesses with the challenges that the pandemic has brought but also delivering an economic recovery that goes beyond relying on what came before. Recovery will bring with it lots of opportunities for Cumbrian businesses to diversify or enter new market segments and we must provide assistance, support and thought leadership to help them fulfil that potential.

Of course, a phased approach to exiting lockdown will still have broad and deep consequences for our national and regional economies but, until we have clarity on what the precise approach is, it is difficult to predict the economic impacts on the local economy. It is probably prudent to plan for a recovery period of at least three years and to not expect the economy to bounce back rapidly.

Given the significant uncertainty as to how the national and local economy will recover, our recovery work will need to be capable of being adapted to a rapidly changing situation.

We must continue to contribute to the LRF's Business Economic Recovery Group and work closely with existing networks, including CLEP in delivering their 'Restart, Reboot, Rethink' strategy.

Allerdale must focus on:

- a. ***Developing an economic recovery plan for Allerdale*** that:
 - can evolve and be tailored to respond to our economic requirements as the position on the phased exit from lockdown becomes clearer and our understanding of the impacts on the borough are better understood. This will require good qualitative place-based information to be gathered as well as tracking a mix of traditional and new economic indicators;
 - examines the impact to the labour market and articulates responses;
 - ensures that as many businesses as possible continue to operate safely;
 - identifies where resources are needed in order to fill in any gaps left by national programmes that are supporting business recovery, particularly in those leisure, tourism and hospitality businesses in Allerdale that are "falling

- through the cracks". Lobbying to fill gaps needs to be amplified quickly to prevent the extinction of businesses;
- assesses the impact on the visitor economy including the culture, leisure, hospitality, events and night time economy offer. Consideration of interventions to support the resilience of those elements of the economy which are likely to be the last to open up due to the challenges associated with social distancing; and
 - review existing strategies to determine if any new interventions are needed.
- b. Continuing to deliver the ***national programmes of support grants*** and developing any discretionary schemes (including for retail, hospitality and leisure)
- c. Sustain confidence in the ***residential and commercial development market*** by continuing to encourage pre-planning discussions, progressing planning applications to decision, and concluding the necessary legal arrangements for projects that will drive our growth objectives and have a demonstrable capacity to deliver quickly.
- d. ***Encourage new development in the Allerdale district.*** This, in turn, will be critical to sustaining employment in construction and related sectors, and their supply chains. This is an essential element of effective and sustainable recovery, and will also help bolster our tax base going forwards.
- e. Continue to ***progress economic regeneration schemes*** including work on accessing funding for the Towns Fund in Workington, the Future High Street Fund and Heritage Action Zone in Maryport, the Growth Deal funding from CLEP at Lillyhall and look to other investment and regeneration opportunities with development partners and the Allerdale Investment Partnership.

Longer term, there are opportunities for the Council to have a role in key interventions, which subject to funding being secured at a national, regional or local level, could take the form of contributing to the development of those proposals or actually delivering them directly.

Proposals could take the form of:

- f. ***Supporting our business base*** – many businesses will be saddled with debt and traditional approaches to support and lending may no longer be appropriate. We should be working with partner agencies and Banks to develop ideas about platforms for recapitalising businesses which, but for the crisis, had strong market prospects and the potential to generate new local employment opportunities.
- g. ***Labour Market Interventions*** - we will need to give consideration to what labour market interventions need to be introduced if the Government does not wish to engage. Some form of localised labour market initiative needs to be considered, targeted at those residents who were disadvantaged in the labour market prior to COVID-19 e.g. NEET young people and over 50s who will now be further disadvantaged.
- h. ***Skills for Recovery*** - Following the end of the Government furlough scheme, there is a risk that many Allerdale residents will become unemployed and those who work

in retail, tourism and hospitality are at particular risk. There will need to be an agile and flexible skills offer to retrain those local residents, working with employers where there are job opportunities

- i. ***Transport, Infrastructure and Planning*** – work with Cumbria County Council, developers and other organisations to promote development of opportunities for infrastructure, road improvements and potential opportunities for the port of Workington.

2. Response - Testing, Tracing and PPE

This work includes our contribution to testing, tracking and tracing the virus and its impacts. The success of the recovery will be significantly influenced by the success of contact tracing and testing. On 23 April, the Government announced that a National Contact Tracing Service (NCTS) would be established as part of a wider test, trace and track approach, which will be aligned to national and local testing strategies. The Government's app is still under development.

There will also be a collaborative approach with local and national partner agencies to ensure that the national Public Health England model is co-designed and developed in a way that works for the communities of Allerdale.

We will progress our approach to procuring suitable PPE and testing equipment – including antibody testing – for our staff and other workers at the earliest opportunity and thereafter monitor and manage the situation to build up resilience within the organisation.

Our staff will play an active role in intervening to implement the requirements of the new coronavirus regulations and national guidance as well supporting partner organisations. For example, Environmental Health Officers have been identified by the Government as additional resources to implement response activity and to regulate compliance with regulations. Equally, licensing officers will be required to review licences and, if necessary or appropriate, apply additional or modified conditions.

We will continue to provide a weekly situational awareness report to the county's Recovery Advisory Group to include an overview of our various service areas that may impact on the multi-agency recovery and any known forecasted activities.

The information we supply is amalgamated with that of other agencies to ensure the RAG is sighted on current and future recovery activity across the Cumbria Resilience Forum. This will support early co-ordination of activities across the Sub-Groups.

3. Community Support and Health & Wellbeing

The work will be to manage our approach to the wider health legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic and to support communities including addressing family poverty, homelessness and unemployment.

We will consider how residents and communities across the district are supported as we move out of the current restrictions and importantly, how we continue to best support

residents at greater risk as we move from the response phase into recovery. Those at greater risk include residents on the NHS 'shielded' list and those with wider risk factors - in terms of health inequality, poverty and poor economic outcomes, those with social risk factors, those with a wider set of medical issues, and those with a combination of these factors. This includes factors such as social isolation, domestic abuse, those with low income or in receipt of benefits, those in insecure, low-paid work, the ageing population, and those with other long term medical conditions.

Allerdale contributes to existing health and wellbeing networks to bring together data and intelligence to understand which people are at greater risk, to enable intensive support to be targeted effectively during the recovery period. Work is co-ordinated and delivered through the Allerdale Health and Wellbeing Forum, linking with the multi-agency Local Focus Hub, Integrated Care Communities, Children's Trust Board, Allerdale Work and Skills Partnership etc. The Council will build on and develop existing and new relationships to offer targeted, effective and long term support and assistance, through recovery and beyond.

It is likely that the Allerdale Community Response Hub that has been established to support vulnerable residents will need to remain in place for some time. This is an additional service which will need to be resourced and will be reflected in the Council's revised budget.

Work to support communities will vary regionally and locally across communities within Allerdale. As a district council we have the benefit of being closer to communities across a wide range of issues and can use that locality-based intelligence on issues such as poverty and deprivation, community resilience, relationships, vulnerable families, unemployment and neighbourhood matters to develop a place-led activity program that is tailored to the needs of our individual communities.

By working with partners and analysing equalities impacts, we can more fully understand how specific adverse impacts can be minimised. Some affected groups include:

- Ethnicity - Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities have disproportionately suffered from COVID-19 and are particularly vulnerable to both the health and economic impacts of the pandemic;
- Gender - women are more exposed to COVID-19 through greater presence in health and care occupations, while men have suffered from a higher death rate; women are at greater risk of domestic violence during lockdown;
- Age - older people are more vulnerable to COVID-19, particularly those with serious medical conditions and have been more affected by the social effects of self-isolating during the response phase;
- Disability - those who rely on care and those with serious medical conditions have been particularly affected;
- Children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) have been particularly affected by schools closing and the difficulties for them receiving the support they need;
- LGBT communities are more likely to have poorer health outcomes
- Poverty - the economic impacts of COVID-19 will affect the poorest families hardest and the clear link between poverty and health conditions mean the virus will also medically affect the poorest disproportionately.

4. ABC operations, duties and transformation

This work includes ensuring sustainability of new ways of working that have been developed during the response to COVID-19 and ensuring resources are aligned to maintain high levels of performance for our customers. Consideration must be given to how the Council will adapt to a phased release (and ramping up) of the lockdown and what this means for service delivery.

This theme will consider the changes that the Council will make to how it operates during the recovery period, building on the success and learning from our experiences during the COVID-19 period. This includes new ways of working, with large-scale home and remote working for the majority of our staff, who have quickly adapted to digital tools for running meetings and new ways of working effectively with customers. There is also potential to build on the positive experiences of our elected members by carrying the momentum of virtual meetings (legislation permitting) through recovery and beyond. We hope to ensure that Allerdale's members continue to benefit from the use of digital technology through easier and improved opportunities for engagement with democratic processes, training, development and more.

The Transformation and Commercialisation Programme as well as the work on designing our new Operating Model is being reshaped and will now directly support the recovery work. Activity will include:

- a. **Continuing to modernise working practices.** This will support continued remote and home working during the phased exit from the lockdown arrangements and in the long term thereafter. The work will include:
 - Creating a long-term resource management function that facilitates a flexible and agile approach to working across departments, aligning our resources to our priorities and offering development opportunities to our staff.
 - the continued support and training for Microsoft 365
 - video conferencing technology through Microsoft Teams
 - a new and easier to use intranet via Workplace
 - roll out of improved telephony and mobile devices
 - equipping meeting rooms for video conferencing to enable attendance at virtual and hybrid meetings
 - ensuring clear protocols around the tools and equipment needed to work from home (second screens, office chairs and desks)
 - developing a common, consistent approach to keeping in touch that is effective and doesn't negatively impact on productivity by taking up too much time.

- b. **Our properties** – with more people working remotely more of the time, our organisation will not need as much office space and each member of staff will no longer require their own individual permanent desk. We must develop a plan for how we operate Allerdale House and our area offices. Feedback to our staff surveys suggest that a hybrid model could work best as many staff consider that there remains the need to have the ability to work from the office as and when required. While we can and should consider whether we need an office at all, it could prove difficult to hold together a culture and optimise productivity without a central place of work of some format.

- c. **Improved data management** - ensuring there are clear policies for handling, storing and archiving data (including documents and emails) with the appropriate security in place. This is even more important for an organisation that is predominantly working remotely.
- d. **Continued focus on digital transformation** – we will continue working to improve how customers can engage and interact with the Council.
- e. **More agile and effective decision making** – bringing the learning from COVID-19 response into the development of our governance framework including quick decision making, regular communication with Councillors and strong relationships between the Executive and Scrutiny.
- f. **Practical activity to change how we work** in response to COVID-19 - alongside transformational change activity, the Council will need to take a series of practical steps in the short term to change the way we provide services to customers and to ensure that our working practices are safe, compliant and effective as we move from the response phase into recovery.

Property Services and Corporate Health & Safety have developed processes and undertaken risk assessments to protect the safety of our staff. Guidance includes:

- Office staff should work from home if at all possible.
 - Planning for the minimum number of people needed on site
 - Monitoring the wellbeing of employees who are working from home
 - Keeping in touch with off-site employees including welfare, mental and physical health and personal security
 - Staggering arrival/departure times to reduce crowding in and out
 - Providing additional and spaced out parking or bike racks
 - Reducing congestion, for example by having more entry points to the workplace.
 - Handwashing or hand sanitation at entry and exit points
 - Review layouts, line setups, or processes to let employees work further apart
 - Arranging for employees to work side-by-side or facing away from each other
 - Screens to create a physical barrier between people
 - Floor tape or paint to mark areas to help employees keep to a 2-metre distance
 - Avoiding use of hot desks and spaces
 - Using remote working tools, to avoid in-person meetings
 - Avoiding transmission during meetings, avoiding sharing pens
 - Only necessary participants should attend meetings
 - Hand sanitiser in meeting rooms
 - Limiting or restricting occupancy in group interaction spaces
 - Introducing more one-way flow routes through buildings
 - Reducing maximum occupancy for lifts, providing hand sanitiser for the operation of lifts, and encouraging use of stairs
 - Regulating use of corridors, lifts, and staircases
 - Staggering break times to reduce pressure on the break rooms, using outside areas for breaks
- g. **Reviewing service delivery** – with reference to business impact assessments for business continuity and service delivery plans, managers and Heads of Service

should use their professional experience and expertise to develop service-specific recovery plans to include any changes to work processes, recommendations for how high levels of performance can be maintained, risks that are presented by COVID-19 and mitigating steps as well as a plan setting out how phased recovery will work.

Next Steps

1. Agree the approach set out in the Recovery Strategy and the Terms of Reference for the ABC Recovery Group;
2. Meet weekly to progress the role of the ABC Recovery Group in providing leadership on the strategic co-ordination and delivery of Allerdale's recovery plan;
3. Utilise the ABC Recovery Group to actively influence the county-wide LRF Recovery Advisory Group's approach to local and regional recovery;
4. Use our position on the LRF Recovery Advisory Group to ensure that it actively lobbies and shapes the national policy position so far as possible;
5. Heads of Service and Managers to develop service-specific recovery plans for each service area to plan for service delivery and phased recovery;