



# **Third Report of the Response to the Pandemic Task and Finish Group**

**June 2021**

# THIRD REPORT OF RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC TASK AND FINISH GROUP

## 1. Introduction

The group was created to explore aspects of the response to the pandemic for this Council. For this element of the work, the group members were:

Councillor Michael Heaslip (chair)  
Councillor Peter Kendall  
Councillor Elaine Lynch  
Councillor Carni McCarron-Holmes  
Councillor Paul Scott

Over two meetings the group had presentations from and discussions with Paul Wood, Head of Transformation and Andrew Seekings, Chief Executive.

## 2. Background

Having considered aspects of the effects of the pandemic on the community, the group decided to focus the third set of sessions on any resulting effects on the delivery of services and the staff team delivering those services.

## 3. Transformation of service provision

The proposed future operating model was being based on research and surveys of staff attitudes as well as taking account of changes in the external world.

The intended model is to provide options for services to be accessed online, using a principle of being able to speak to someone when needed and using technology when not, for example paying a bill. Contact with officers would be available as necessary though the preferred form of contact for many interactions would be through other methods, mainly online.

The proposed future working model for staff is a hybrid of working from home and time in the office, though as a result of the pandemic most staff have been working from home. Some emergency response services have had staff working from the offices.

The group members recommend that care be taken to ensure that this would not lead to a scattered provision and staff would gain some grounding in how the organisation works, especially newer staff.

Members also recommend that councillors are assisted to understand these changes and new staff arrangements or responsibilities to help them with any queries.

Members further recommend that due consideration be given to the legitimate expectations of citizens to have access to the Council and its services in ways appropriate to their circumstances, so far as possible, and that any transformation of service provision should consider “purpose” as the starting point, with “purpose” defined by outcomes for citizens, measured in their terms.

Members recalled that humans are social animals and value face to face contact in public offices and elsewhere, and the pandemic has cut many off from social contact: a pandemic response which reinforces isolation rather than promoting human contact is unlikely to meet the expectations of all citizens.

#### **4. Innovation in responsiveness and developing solutions**

The second meeting focused on discussion with the Chief Executive to understand the proposals for changes to the operating model and consequently to the staffing structure to deliver these proposals.

A key feature of the new model is dealing with as much work as possible at the frontline, enabling front line staff to resolve issues at first contact wherever possible without necessarily referring to a “back office”. It is recognised that this may involve significant changes in skills and knowledge for staff at the “front office”, with consequences for their training and development. It is also recognised that not everyone will want to or be able to work in this way, and that staff have different strengths and are best used in ways which enable them to develop those strengths.

Capital programmes are at the heart of the Whitehall approach to pandemic recovery, and the new model will need to recognise this and deploy people with the appropriate strengths, skills and knowledge to work in that context.

Members recalled that the original *purpose* for which District Councils were called into being was Public Health, and most District Council functions have their origins in measures to protect and improve health. The pandemic has been a salutary reminder to us (if not yet to Whitehall) of the centrality of local public health to the well-being of the country, and any pandemic recovery measures need to include innovation in how we better approach securing the health and well-being of our citizens.

#### **5. Recommendations**

The Task and Finish Group makes the following recommendations:

1. The Council should collect appropriate data and/or conduct research to ensure service levels from the perspective of the citizen are the same or better since the implementation of any changes.

2. The Council must ensure the staff team is supported to understand, implement and deliver through any changes to service delivery models and practices
3. Councillors must be supported to effectively support residents as a result of any service or staffing changes

Also, the Task and Finish Group reiterates these prior recommendations:

4. The Council should embed the principles and approaches outlined in this report in its Resilient Communities Strategy and approach, incorporating a model of community development which focuses on working with people and communities and includes councillors as collective community leaders in their areas.
5. The Council should be at the forefront of new approaches by creating opportunities
  - a – for staff to develop their skills in relational work with communities,
  - b – for communities to be supported ... including undertaking research then developing projects based on the results.