

Report to Cabinet

Subject: Covid-19 – The Council’s Reset Strategy

Date: 18 June 2020

Author: Senior Leadership Team

Wards Affected

Borough wide

Purpose

To outline the Council’s approach to recovery in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the key work streams which will underpin this work and seek approval for the Reset Strategy.

Key Decision

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards of the Borough.

Recommendations

THAT:

- 1. The steps that have already been taken to reinstate services be noted;**
- 2. The Reset Strategy at Appendix 2 which sets out the Council’s approach to recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic be approved;**
- 3. The approach proposed in respect of the five work streams which will underpin the reset plans be supported; and**
- 4. The Gedling Plan priorities and actions be reviewed in light of the consequences of Covid-19.**

1 Background

- 1.1 The Covid-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented global impact and a significant impact on the local economy, our residents and communities and the council itself. The Council's response to the challenges presented by the virus has been outstanding and is detailed in a separate report on this agenda. The focus has been on coordinating the immediate response to the pandemic and ensuring support to the most vulnerable in the borough, the safety of staff and continuation of essential public services. It is clear that this response phase is likely to continue for some time, however progress has been made to plan for the recovery of the borough's economy and businesses, residents and communities, as well as the Council including its services and finances. Returning to 'normal' and the subsequent 'reset' phase is likely to be complex and take several months. The approach taken by the Council now will shape the culture of the Council itself and will influence what the borough's economy, businesses, residents and communities will look like in years to come.
- 1.2 In the same way as the Council's response to the pandemic, the next phase will be influenced by government policy decisions and legislative changes. Whilst the situation is uncertain and may evolve over time, it is important that the Council progresses its plans and is ready to respond to those policy decisions in a timely and structured fashion.
- 1.3 This report sets out the Council's approach to the Reset phase and the key work streams which will underpin this work. These work streams will assess the impact of the pandemic and identify short, medium and longer term priority actions to achieve defined objectives. This is likely to generate a significant amount of unplanned work and a potential need to refocus existing planned activity.
- 1.4 It is important to note that the reinstatement of services which were previously suspended as a result of the pandemic has already begun. Where government guidance and/or staffing resources have allowed, a decision has been taken by the Leader to re-instate services as soon as possible. A list of the decisions made at the time of writing this report is attached at Appendix 1.
- 1.5 The success of the next phase of work will be significantly influenced by the success of contact tracing and testing (which it is recognised may take several months), the introduction of a vaccine, and avoiding further spikes in cases which trigger a return to lockdown measures.

2 Proposal

2.1 It is proposed that as we move into the next phase, the Council takes the opportunity not to simply return to 'normal' but strives to '*build back better*'. A YouGov poll of 4,343 adults conducted for the Royal Society of Arts published in April 2020 found that a clear majority (85%) want to see at least some of the personal or social changes they have experienced continue afterwards, while just 9% want a complete return to "normal" after the coronavirus outbreak is over.

2.2 Whilst Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on families, communities and businesses across the borough, the country and the world, it is also important that the Council recognises the positive consequences. The majority of Council services have continued whilst staff work from home and avoid the daily commute to the office. Vital communications have continued 'virtually' without the need for physical meetings. The sense of community has flourished with hundreds of volunteers stepping forward to support the humanitarian effort and others generously donating to the Mayor's Foodbank fundraiser campaign enabling the target to be exceeded. Many businesses have quickly adapted to on-line orders as they had to close their doors to customers. The environment has thrived with a significant short term reduction in CO2 emissions due to reductions in travel and energy use. It is proposed that all of these positives are retained and where possible enhanced further, and that the Council doesn't simply put in place plans to 'recover' back to 'normal', but that our plans strive to build something better.

2.3 The actions and responses to be taken by officers of the Council during the next 12 months are set out in the later paragraphs of this report. However, there are also longer term aspirations that require due attention, and these will be addressed through the Reset phase as part of the work to review the Gedling Plan. These key issues are:

- Tackling inequalities;
- Cultural and digital transformation;
- Equalities and diversity;
- Climate change and the environment.

2.4 The Gedling Plan

2.4.1 The Gedling Plan 2020-23 was approved by Cabinet in February 2020 and Council in March 2020 immediately prior to Covid-19 having significant impact. It was developed over a number of months based on updated datasets and analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats ('SWOT') of both the Borough and the Council. The Plan set an ambitious vision for the borough and a 3-year action

plan based around the following 5 priorities:

- Cohesive, Diverse and Safe Communities
- High Performing Council
- Vibrant Economy
- Sustainable Environment
- Healthy Lifestyles

2.4.2 Although the Plan is only a few months old, it is clear that the global, national and most importantly local context is very different. It is therefore proposed that a review is carried out as a priority to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and recognises the new work streams to deliver the Reset Strategy set out below. Actions in the Gedling Plan which will influence successful recovery will need to be prioritised whilst other projects may need to be delivered in different ways or re-profiled to future years. The outcome of this review will be reported to Cabinet at a future meeting.

2.5 **The Reset Strategy**

2.5.1 It is proposed that the Reset Strategy at Appendix 2, which sets out the Council's approach to recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, is approved.

2.5.2 The Strategy will be delivered through five work streams which will be grouped into three overarching aspects as follows. Each work stream will be led by a member of Senior Leadership Team overseen by the Acting Chief Executive:

- Business
- Residents and communities
- The Council
 - Frontline services
 - Support services
 - Finance

2.5.3 These work streams will be underpinned by:

- An assessment of the impact of Covid-19 to inform a data-led action plan.
- The review of the Gedling Plan referred to above.
- Continued work with key stakeholders and other organisations.
- Capturing lessons learned.
- Regular progress updates to Cabinet.
- Effective external and internal communications.

- 2.5.4 Project teams have been established where appropriate to support the Senior Leadership Team in progressing this work. An action plan for each work stream will be prepared which includes phasing and timescales. At this stage, an overview of expected strands of work is set out below.

Business

- 2.5.5 This work stream is focused on Gedling's economy and intervening, where required, to ensure it "bounces back" as quickly as possible. This is crucial as a vibrant economy helps to underpin a wider reset for the Borough, as it provides people with job opportunities, the chance to reskill to access different jobs, access to shops, services and facilities, whilst also supporting the visitor economy. There are three main areas of work under this work stream: Regeneration, Re-discover and Restore.

Regeneration – physical regeneration schemes and action plans to demonstrate the Council's intention to help support the place shaping agenda and physical regeneration required to kick start other investment in the Borough's economy.

Re-discover – as the Covid-19 restrictions are eased, work will be required to help support and encourage residents and visitors to "rediscover" the borough and its local assets (including town and local shopping areas, visitor attractions, recreational uses and community centres). This will require a series of co-ordinated and targeted initiatives, all under an umbrella marketing campaign. Funding amounting to £105k has been allocated to Gedling from the Re-opening High Streets Safely fund to help with the work required to re-open town and local centres on 15th June.

Restore – business confidence and provide support where required, including training, networking events, work placement programmes, and employment and skills initiatives. This will involve working with a range of partners: Department of Work and Pensions, Nottingham Trent University, Local Enterprise Partnership and the Metro Strategy group. Key projects include:

Gedling Plan objective: Improve social mobility and life chances:

- Updating the locality plans for Netherfield, Newstead and Killsick.

Gedling Plan objective: Provide more homes:

- Delivery of the Station and Burton Road housing schemes.

Gedling Plan objective: Drive business growth, workforce development and job opportunities:

- Providing a Small Business Advisor/Retail Business Advisor to support local businesses;
- Promoting the Council's Economic Growth and Regeneration team by:
 - updating the website page to be more user friendly and to help signpost businesses and retailers to the right sources of information;
 - Contacting all businesses and retailers to signpost them to the new website and what help is on offer;
- Obtaining a detailed understanding of the localised problems and issues to inform a detailed action plan of what measures and initiatives are required;
- Updating guidance to business sectors on reopening safely to reflect changes in the lockdown;
- Developing a strategy and framework for the distribution of funding of £900,000 to businesses within the borough under the Local Authority Discretionary Fund.

Gedling Plan objective: Create thriving and vibrant town and local centres:

Delivery of the following key projects:

- Arnold Market Place redevelopment;
- Carlton Square improvements;
- Station and Burton Road housing schemes;
- Arnold Town Centre Action Plan;
- Hill Crest Park, Calverton business park extension.

Gedling Plan objective: Improve transport infrastructure and connectivity:

- With partners, to deliver infrastructure initiatives to support the future of the local economy (e.g. 5G, superfast broadband, free town centre Wi-Fi, electric charging points, park and ride, new build housing, affordable housing etc.)

Residents and Communities

- 2.5.6 This work stream will initially focus on how residents and communities can be supported as the current restrictions are lifted. This will run in tandem with the Giving for Gedling Humanitarian response which was established to support residents in need during the response phase and will need to remain in place for some time. A longer term plan will be

developed which seeks to rebuild community capacity and resilience and further develop the volunteering effort. This will include enabling a strengthened community by giving them a voice, by listening and by considering their needs when planning and shaping work.

This work stream is complex and the work programme is likely to become embedded as business as usual for years to come. The first stage will be to gather data to understand the immediate impacts on residents and communities, in particular ascertaining where new inequalities have emerged or existing equalities worsened by the pandemic. It is recognised that there are limited resources in the Borough to build community capacity; as we do not have a community and voluntary service infrastructure body as other districts do. Therefore the work programme will need to be co-produced with key local partners, local engagement forums and communities, responding to and providing direction and influencing change as appropriate. This will ensure we can make best use of the collective resources available.

Gedling Plan objective: Promote and encourage pride, good citizenship and participation:

- Planned safe re-introduction of community events;
- Putting in place appropriate arrangements for the safe reinstatement of community leadership forums such as the Seniors' Council and Youth Council;
- Delivering the Pride of Gedling Awards;
- Further development of volunteering to increase independence and resilience in our communities by enabling more residents and community groups to do more for themselves;
- Conducting impact assessments to understand the immediate financial and operational pressures on and challenges around the long term sustainability of small charities and voluntary organisations;
- Continuing to support the voluntary and community sector as we move out of lockdown and considering future requirements for support.

Gedling Plan objective: Reduce poverty and inequality and provide support to the most vulnerable:

- Data gathering to understand the immediate impacts on residents and communities, in particular ascertaining where new inequalities have emerged or existing equalities worsened by the pandemic. This will enable the Council to understand the needs of and focus attention on those whose situation has deteriorated

disproportionately. Our work plan to improve social mobility across the borough will seek to reduce the health inequality gap and all of its adverse impacts.

Gedling Plan objective: Improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities:

- Re-establishing the coordinated community centred wellbeing approach to integrated health and wellbeing programmes as outlined in the Council's current Health and Wellbeing Delivery Plan;
- Working with the Gedling Health and Wellbeing Partnership, the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care System and the evolving Public Health networks across Nottinghamshire to identify emerging health priorities for Gedling and establish a revised data-led delivery plan;
- Adopting an integrated whole system wellbeing approach to agency and sector working from strategic to neighbourhood level ensuring all commissioned health services are meeting the needs of the Gedling population;
- A community asset based approach where communities and all agencies can support residents through physical and social activities.

Gedling Plan objective: Reduce levels of loneliness and isolation:

- Developing and working with key stakeholders to embed a sustainable social prescribing programme for vulnerable and lonely and isolated residents across the borough;
- Supporting local groups to tackle loneliness and isolation;
- Enabling the development of strong community wellbeing hubs and venues across the Borough that offer support and help to connect our residents;
- Considering how digital technology can be embraced to support those most isolated in the community;
- Considering the mental health needs of staff and our communities when developing plans and future services.

The Council – Frontline Services

- 2.5.7 This work stream will focus on re-establishing the services our residents' access and benefit from on a daily basis, but in a manner that is fully cognisant of the social distancing requirements flowing from the first wave of the pandemic. The plan will draw upon our learning so far and will focus on how we can continue to provide our services in the event of further outbreaks. Having identified our core statutory services we will

further develop plans that are adaptable and resilient, and where needed, will draw on other parts of the Council to support their delivery.

Our planning will be sensitive to the fact that customers need to have renewed confidence in frontline services in the public sector because of 'lockdown' and we recognise that for many, engagement with services will generate a natural degree of nervousness.

With the requirement to have Local Outbreak Plans to tackle Coronavirus we will continually review how our front line services can support these new arrangements and manage this process through our established Response Incident Management Team.

Gedling plan objective: Promote and encourage pride, good citizenship and participation:

- Building upon the work we do with those many volunteers who formally registered with us to help the council and local residents by supporting our successful humanitarian effort;
- Re-establishing the Gedling Big Clean Forum Group to help the council keep the borough free from litter.

Gedling plan objective: Reduce poverty and inequality and provide support to the most vulnerable:

- Continuing to deliver our humanitarian offer and provide food and support to the most vulnerable across the borough, particularly focussing on supporting those in need who have to self-isolate as a result of the 'testing and tracing service' where they are experiencing difficulty in accessing food;
- Rough sleepers and the homeless are currently provided accommodation under the government's "everyone in" campaign. This is a huge joint effort by local councils, charities, health and care services, and accommodation providers to protect rough sleepers from the virus, and we must continue to do so;
- Linked to the above, the council will continue to work with developers and local housing providers to deliver additional temporary accommodation units and 'move-on' properties;
- Homelessness prevention activities will be prepared to respond the potential increased demand when the temporary restrictions on landlord evictions are lifted by Government.

Gedling plan objective: Reduce anti-social behaviours, crime and the fear of crime:

- Our Neighbourhood Wardens, in partnership with the Police will develop patrol plans for our parks and open spaces to ensure that social distancing requirements are effectively maintained;
- The Council's Public Protection Team will take a key lead role in preventing and investigating anti-social behaviour reports that arise throughout the pandemic period.

Gedling plan objective: Improve the customer experience of engaging with the Council:

- Our services will focus on positively re-engaging our customers and to provide them with the reassurance they need, that what we do is Covid-19 safe all of the time. Our staff will be briefed on how to approach this re-engagement work to re-establish the 'Gedling brand' across the borough.

Gedling plan objective: Provide effective and efficient services:

- Reinstating our commercial services and focus on trading to generate income to support the Council's financial plan.

Gedling plan objective: Provide an attractive and sustainable local environment that people can enjoy:

- We will accelerate our project work at Gedling Country Park ensuring the timely delivery of the additional car parking, outdoor seating areas and two feature viewing platforms;
- We are committed to planting 500 trees across the borough to reinforce the Council's commitment to a sustainable environment.

Gedling plan objective: Promote and protect the environment by minimising pollution and waste and becoming carbon neutral:

- One of the environmental benefits of the lockdown phase has been the tangible decreases in harm emissions from traffic. We will take this opportunity to double up on our efforts and commitment to encourage more walking and cycling across the borough as a more sustainable way to travel to work in the future;
- We intend to develop specific plans to improve recycling rates across the borough.

Gedling plan objective: Improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities:

- Recognising that our residents have adjusted and developed their daily exercise routines throughout lockdown period. We will take the opportunity to reinforce the value of daily exercise to improve health outcomes;
- Specifically we will look to reopen leisure centres and other community facilities having full regard to national guidance to ensure Covid-19 safe environments;
- Expediting the planned work to launch the Gedling Forces Leisure Card and the new swimming passport offer.

Gedling plan objective: Support physically active life styles:

- Recognising that for many exercising outdoors throughout lockdown has provided a unique opportunity to take exercise locally that they would not ordinarily have done. Our intention is to build on this capital and revisit our leisure programme not only to make the most of the buildings that we have, but also to look for opportunities to deliver our services in the Council's outstanding parks and open spaces.

2.5.8 **The Council – Support Services**

This work stream will initially focus on safe reintroduction of essential face-to-face services from the civic centre, reinstatement of council meetings and management of council workspaces, however the opportunity for transformation through sustaining and enhancing the agile ways of working, environmental benefits and dynamic decision making to realise the full benefits will also be explored. This work will include:

Gedling Plan objective: Improve the customer experience of engaging with the council:

- Planned re-opening of council offices to the public.

Gedling Plan objective: Provide efficient and effective services:

- Reinstating Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings;
- Re-launch of marketing plans for council commercial services.

Gedling Plan objective: maintain a positive and supportive working environment and strong employee morale:

- Ensuring appropriate safe systems of work are in place to enable staff to return to the office, which includes effective social distancing within the office environment during the phased exit

- from lockdown and potentially for a much longer period;
- Supporting continued remote working during the phased exit from the lockdown arrangements. This will include the continued roll out of Microsoft Teams for video conferencing and more soft phones and exploration of equipping meeting rooms for video conferencing to enable attendance at virtual meetings;
 - Consultation with managers and the wider workforce to understand the impact of Covid-19 and to capture key data including the dependencies to resuming 'normal' services, lessons learned, opportunities for service transformation and support required;
 - Development of a business case for continued agile and flexible working when we are out of lockdown. This will include consideration of replacement of remaining desktop PCs with laptops and a large scale issue of softphones with a significant reduction of physical handsets;
 - Completion of the review of the Constitution to support agile and effective decision making.

Gedling Plan objective: Improve use of digital technologies:

- Putting in place improved electronic storage and management of data, which will be key to the success of continued remote working;
- Further development of digital interactions with customers, whilst also ensuring that effective communications are in place for those sectors of the community who may not have access to digital platforms.

Gedling Plan objective: Promote and protect the environment by minimising pollution and waste and becoming carbon neutral:

- Progressing climate change plans, by establishing a baseline for the Council's carbon emissions and developing projects to spend the allocated monies.

The Council – Finance

- 2.5.9 This work stream will focus on maintaining the Council's financial resilience and sustainability, ensuring it is able to meet its financial and service commitments in the short, medium and longer term. Resources will be effectively prioritised and closely aligned to the reviewed Gedling Plan and the reset action plans to support the achievement of objectives. The Council's financial management and

financial planning will be responsive and adaptable to emerging pressures and evolving reset plans.

Gedling Plan Objective: Provide Efficient and Effective Services:

- Continuous monitoring of financial impacts to identify emerging pressures and recommend strategies to ensure a balanced annual budget is maintained to avoid the requirement to implement a Section 114 notice under the regulations of the Local Government Finance Act;
- Reviewing the Medium Term Financial Plan and associated strategic risk issues, including reserve requirements and recommend actions to secure a sustainable position;
- Driving delivery of the agreed efficiency programme;
- Reviewing the current efficiency programme and, if appropriate, determine updated targets for allocation in accordance with priorities;
- Reviewing the Gedling Plan and reset action plans to identify full financial implications and support the process for prioritisation of resources;
- Continuous review of the cash flow position to ensure commitments can be met. This will include a review of both investment and borrowing requirements;
- Ensuring that that implementation of the Financial Management Code is aligned to the new 'reset' longer term vision of the Council;
- Ensuring effective revenue debt collection process are reintroduced at the appropriate time, balancing the impact on the customer with the need to maintain income collection;
- Ensure the Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction Scheme and discretionary hardship payments are effectively publicised to ensure they can be accessed by those most in need.

3 Alternative Options

- 3.1 An alternative option would be not to agree a formal strategy, however failure to do so will result in a lack of clear understanding of the Council's strategic objectives and ineffective plans being progressed.
- 3.2 The Council could agree a different strategy, however it is considered that the document proposed sets out an appropriate framework to not simply 'recover' back to 'normal', but to strive to build something better.
- 3.3 The Council could continue to deliver the Gedling Plan as approved in March 2020, however given the significant impact of the Covid-19

pandemic, this could result in the Council overlooking important emerging priorities.

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications directly arising from this report. Any financial implications which arise from individual work streams will be included in future reports.

5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising out of this report.

6 Equalities Implications

- 6.1 Throughout the pandemic there have been emerging trends in equality impacts for minority and vulnerable groups. These trends have led to disproportionate and often disadvantageous outcomes for some groups of people. Some of the affected groups include:

- Ethnicity - Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19 and are particularly vulnerable to both the health and economic impacts of the pandemic. Information published by the Office for National Statistics and Institute of Fiscal Studies indicates that the impacts are not uniform across ethnic groups, with Covid-19 hospital deaths among the black Caribbean population three times higher than the white British group.

- 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. The institute of Fiscal Studies has also reported that mothers are more likely to have lost their jobs or been furloughed and are spending more time on household responsibilities than fathers.

- 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. Research carried out by the Office for National Statistics shows that nearly three-quarters (6.4 million) of people aged 70 and over in Great Britain are worried about the effect that Coronavirus is having on their life; with over two-fifths (2.9 million) of them saying their mental health has been affected and half (3.3 million) reporting that their access to essential items like groceries and medication had been affected.

- Disability - those who rely on care and those with serious medical conditions have been particularly affected. The Office for National Statistics has reported that nearly two thirds of disabled adults say Covid-19 related concerns are affecting their well-being; and disabled adults were significantly more likely to report spending too much time

alone.

- 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.

- LGBTQ – The LGBT Foundation has identified a number of impacts on the LGBT community. LGBT people are more likely to be socially isolated; some trans and non-binary people have had medical treatments and operations cancelled; LGBT people are also more likely to have poor mental health, issues with substance abuse and more likely to experience domestic abuse.

- 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.

- 6.2 Working with partners, work will be progressed to more fully understand the equality impacts arising from Covid-19 locally and how adverse impacts can be minimised. It is important that we understand where new inequalities have emerged or existing equalities worsened by the pandemic. Individual equality impact assessments will be carried out under each work stream where required.

7 Carbon Reduction/Environmental Sustainability Implications

- 7.1 The Covid-19 lockdown has involved a significant short term reduction in CO2 emissions due to reductions in travel and energy use. These gains will be evidenced and embedded in the Council's reset plans.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 – List of decisions to reinstate services following Covid-19 outbreak.
Appendix 2 – Reset Strategy.

9 Background Papers

- 9.1 None.

10 Reasons for Recommendations

- 10.1 To ensure that the Council has clear strategic objectives and effective plans in place to drive recovery of the Council, businesses and communities.

- 10.2 To ensure that the Gedling Plan remains fit for purpose.

Statutory Officer approval

Approved by the Chief Financial Officer

Date: 9 June 2020

Approved by the Monitoring Officer

Date: 9 June 2020