



CABINET

Subject Heading:

Plan for bringing existing services back on stream post Covid-19 lockdown

Cabinet Member:

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Policy context:

The Government is beginning to ease the lockdown that was imposed on 23 March 2020 to control the spread of Covid-19 nationally. Gradually the Council is able to reopen services that had to close during the lockdown. This report sets out the framework for restoring services.

Financial summary:

The financial costs that will be incurred in bringing services back on stream will be met from within existing budgets or from the Council's PPE budget allocation of £2 million.

Is this a Key Decision?

Yes.

Grounds for decision being Key:

(c) Financial impact exceeding £500k

When should this matter be reviewed?

June 2020

Reviewing OSC:

Overview & Scrutiny Board

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

Communities making Havering
Places making Havering

[X]

[X]

Opportunities making Havering
Connections making Havering

[X]
[X]

SUMMARY

As the Council enters the recovery phase of the Covid-19 emergency, Government and Public Health England guidance on removing lockdown restrictions and opening up work spaces require changes to the way the Council organises its services in order to maintain social distancing requirements, maintain infection control and thus reduce the number of new Covid-19 cases and deaths in the work-force and community at large.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report sets out the framework for restoring individual services across the Council. Approval for reopening services will be sought through Cabinet Member Executive Decisions at the appropriate time where it is appropriate to do so. In some instances, for example on leased or licenced premises, there is not a decision for the Council to take as to whether the facility re-opens or not. The broad framework for bringing services back on stream post Covid-19 is set out in Appendix B.

REPORT DETAIL

Challenge

As the Council enters the recovery phase of the Covid-19 emergency, Government and Public Health England guidance on removing lockdown restrictions and opening up work spaces require changes to the way the Council organises its services in order to maintain social distancing requirements, maintain infection control and thus reduce the number of new Covid-19 cases and deaths in the work-force and community at large.

All services have produced a detailed Recovery Plan and a schedule of these is set out in Appendix A. The detailed plans have been made available as background documents.

A number of public facing services have managed to run almost at full capacity throughout the period of the lockdown, after making adjustments to protect staff and the public e.g. Cemeteries and Crematoriums, Black Bag Collection and the Social Work teams. The work of these teams has been highly appreciated by residents during the period with many compliments having been received.

The majority of back office Council services have successfully continued during the lockdown period supported by staff mainly working from home. Given the continued risks presented by Covid-19 to staff and public, coupled with the restricted capacity in Council office buildings once social distancing is built in, office-based Council staff will remain at home until further notice. This is in line with Government guidance that wherever possible people should work from home.

For the time being, given the limited capacity of the Council's office space under social distancing, office space will be prioritised as follows:

Priority 1 – Front Line. Services or functions that cannot be provided through home working due to their frontline nature.

Priority 2 – Productivity. Services or functions that cannot be provided through home working due to the significant drop-in productivity when operating from home.

Priority 3 – Temporary Need. Cyclical or intermittent need to provide the services or functions on-site due to the nature of the provision.

Priority 4 – Personal Circumstances. Need to provide on-site space for individuals unable to work at home.

However, although many services have continued to operate at a near full level of service delivery throughout the period, some public facing services have had to be withdrawn during the Government's lockdown period. Those services that have been operating at less than 75% of normal activity have been asked to also complete a short summary explaining how they will bring their services back up to full capacity and over what timescale.

Appendix B sets out a schedule of the services which need to be brought back on stream over the coming months. The exact timing of the services restarting can only be estimated at this stage (and in some cases it is not possible to provide an estimate) as this will depend on Government legislation and guidance. Given the uncertainty around timescales, the nature of the guidance that might come from Government and the importance of getting services back up and running as quickly as possible, final decisions to restart services will be made through Executive Decisions approved by Cabinet Members.

Where facilities such as those owned by the Council but leased or licenced to an outside organisation, there is not a decision for the Council to take as to whether

services resume from those facilities. In these instances, the Council will ask what measures are being taken to address Government guidance to minimise the chances of the further spread of Covid-19.

Appendix C sets out a number of new services that have had to be set up, by Government request, during the Covid-19 crisis. These services have been established through Executive Decision reports in relation to the immediate crisis but now need to be reviewed and medium term funding identified. These services will be subject to Executive Decision and Cabinet reports in due course.

Learning from the Recovery Plans

The development of the service Recovery Plans has provided the opportunity for managers to reflect on the performance of their services during the lockdown period. The main findings from this exercise are summarised below:-

- Overall positive experience of home working supported by the Smart Working programme
- Recognition that in many areas productivity has increased as a result of home working
- Greater meeting efficiencies with teleconference and video calls (zero move time)
- Better use of working hours, without a focus of core hours (including travel time)
- Collaboration has improved within and between teams and directorates.
- Across the organisation, improved flexibility has allowed staff to manage their caring responsibilities, especially in relation to children who are out of school
- Understanding has grown that office accommodation isn't essential for all services.

The plans have also identified some improvements that are required which will be built into the full Council Recovery Plan which is scheduled for Cabinet in July 2020.

ICT Improvements

The main improvements identified are:-

- Connectivity and core infrastructure (including data centre) requires significant improvements, although there was overall a positive experience from the technology supporting remote working at scale.

- Smart Working needs additional investment to improve collaboration and productivity.
- Improvements could be made to how technical support and guidance is provided to staff and members for new tools and doing so remotely.
- Greater consideration to what equipment and skills are required for the new ways of working (e.g. flexible office configurations/hosting workshops remotely etc)

HR Improvements

The continuance of remote working for many of the Council's staff poses a series of broader considerations. Whilst not necessarily an exhaustive list, the following serves to highlight the work already in place/in progress in this regard:

Heads of service/managers to review which staff will be unable to sustain remote working (will determine capacity required in offices) – initial Recovery Plans have already been drafted by each service and these are in the process of refinement, supported by a questionnaire to individual staff members to offer a more granular assessment of how individuals are managing the transition to remote working.

Equipment requirements – as the period of remote working extends, there is a need to ensure that employees are adequately equipped to work away from the office for a prolonged period. Equipment needs may include supplementing laptops with larger monitors and the provision of appropriate chairs, requisitioned from empty offices. A protocol is being developed to ensure that this occurs in a managed way based upon prioritised needs.

Guidance on workstation assessments – already in place for the Smart Working programme, staff are able to access online guidance to advise on the appropriate DSE regulations for workstation set-up.

Health and wellbeing support for staff – there are a series of measures in place to support the physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing of staff in these circumstances embedding the ICARE values. Further work is being progressed on bereavement and mental health support for staff.

Encouraging use of annual leave: both to ensure that individuals who have been working extended hours/days have the opportunity to rest and to avoid an excessive build-up of leave that might present operational risks to cover at a later date. An annual leave policy is needed up to 2022 in line with government guidance.

Impact of changes on terms and conditions of employment: whether there are contractual changes presented by some employees potentially being regarded as home workers rather than flexible workers.

Policy development to support new ways of working: reviewing existing policies to accommodate the revised working practices of the Council e.g. flexitime policy.

Leadership and management in a new environment : developing and embedding new skills within the senior tiers to reflect new styles of working

Other HR considerations : Transitioning redeployed staff back into their roles; how we respond to staff who refuse to return to work (those who are unable to work from home; at home with those shielding); ongoing approach to furlough.

Staff returning to the front line: Where staff are being brought back into front line services, full risk assessments must be undertaken by managers in collaboration with staff and the trade unions. The risk assessments will cover the following:-

- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) requirements will need to be agreed. Distribution of PPE has been systematised through 'local PPE Guardians' to manage the appropriate allocation to staff groups including contractors (e.g. Housing repairs)
- Social distancing protocols need to be agreed (e.g. floor markings). This piece of work is currently underway.
- Increased cleaning arrangements in essential office spaces including schools
- Physical screen protection is required for front facing essential services
- Individual assessments may be required for staff who are a higher risk from Covid-19 than is usual
- Improved personal consideration is required to sickness in general (the message is to stay home if you feel unwell).

REASONS AND OPTIONS

Reasons for the decision:

This is a report for noting.

Other options considered:

Do Nothing – the current circumstances effectively preclude a 'Do Nothing' option as a return to 'normal' is not feasible given the ongoing requirements for social distancing and the need to protect both staff and public from potential exposure to Covid-19

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial implications and risks:

The financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in relation to the Council's 2020/21 budget has been significant. These impacts are likely to continue for a number of years. Fuller details are set out in another report on this agenda.

Any costs resulting from restarting existing services are expected to be met from within the service budgets, from within the corporate PPE budget allocation or from the corporate landlord budgets.

Further reports will be brought back to Cabinet in relation to the ongoing costs of the new services introduced, at the request of Government, and set out in Appendix C.

The ongoing financial implications of these arrangements will inform the refresh of the Council's 2020/21 budget and the MTFS over the summer.

Legal implications and risks:

As an employer, the Council has a legal responsibility to protect workers and others from risk to their health and safety which involves doing everything reasonably practicable to minimise the risks of exposure to COVID-19.

Careful consideration must be given to the recommendations set out in the Home Office Guidance 'Working Safely during COVID-19 in offices and contact centres' published on 11th May 2020, and the Health and Safety Executive Guidance documents 'Working Safely during the Coronavirus Outbreak' and 'Talking with your workers about working safely...' before delivering the proposals. This will include undertaking a risk assessment to identify sensible preventative measures to control the risks such as keeping people 2 metres apart wherever possible. Employees must also be consulted on health and safety to ensure their views are considered when assessing workplace risks. Particular regard must be given to those vulnerable to COVID-19 in line with HR Guidance. Failure to take action may result in the Health and Safety Executive giving specific advice, warnings or as a last resort issuing enforcement notices to ensure compliance.

From an employment law point of view, the proposals appear to be lawful and reasonable on the face of it.

Points to consider in the implementation are:

1. Good communication with employees, unions and their health and safety representative is important – setting out the reasons and inviting feedback;
2. Keeping office staff working from home is maintaining the temporary status quo so there is no contractual issue with this;
3. If these changes form part of a push to change the way the Council operates permanently in the future it would be prudent to communicate this to unions with their health and safety representative and employees;

4. Any steps taken should be done sensitively and give consideration to individual circumstances; e.g. there may be further reasonable adjustments to be made for disabled employees;
5. There should be continued emphasis on the pastoral care towards staff wellbeing;

Human Resources implications and risks:

The key message from Government is that wherever possible people should work from home. A range of support is being put in place to support staff who need to work from home eg:-

- Complete roll-out of laptops
- Address the needs of staff requiring adjustments to work stations at home
- Reasonable adjustments (existing and new) eg provision of chairs, screens, mouse mats, foot rests etc.
- Workplace and Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessments
- Guidance on working from home, e.g. holding one to ones, team meetings and objective setting
- Training eg digital skills
- Wellbeing programmes
- Remote induction programmes.

Whilst the Government advice remains that staff should work from home, the Council is responding positively to this and has put in place the above provisions to ensure a safe system of work; this does not change the employment contract with individual members of staff.

However, many services require staff to attend the workplace. A significant amount of work has been done to provide service managers with the guidance and tools they need to prepare for a return to offices and operational spaces to keep staff and service users safe:-

- Managers are required to carry out a Covid-19 risk assessment, in consultation with workers and trade unions
- If possible, and in line with government guidance, publish the results of risk assessments on the Council's website
- Maintain 2m social distancing including while arriving at and departing from work, while in work and when travelling between sites
- Physical works, signage, perspex screens and reduced occupancy to enable social distancing and safe working practices
- Introduction of new office arrangements eg one-way movement, revised seating layouts with fewer desks in use and staff facing away from each other eg by using back to back or side to side working, or using screens or barriers to separate people from each other

- Reducing the number of people each person has contact with by using 'fixed teams or partnering' (so each person works with only a few others)
- Having particular regard to whether people are especially vulnerable to Covid-19 eg BAME staff and those staff shielding with health conditions
- Enhanced cleaning regimes will be required to keep the workplace clean and prevent transmission by touching contaminated surfaces
- Managers will need to limit or restrict use of high touch items and equipment such as printers
- Providing signs and regular reminders to maintain personal hygiene standards
- Increasing frequency of handwashing and providing hand sanitiser in multiple locations
- Setting clear use and guidance for toilets to ensure they are kept clean and for social distancing
- Providing more waste facilities and more frequent collections
- Cleaning procedures in place for equipment and vehicles
- Additional PPE requirements may be required such as gloves, aprons and face masks
- Workforce travel plans may be required with staggered start/end times to reduce the number of people in the office and to avoid busy times on public transport
- Protocols are needed for the use of desks, meeting rooms, tea points, communal areas, entrances and exits, lifts and visitors.

A staff pulse survey is about to be launched and the results of this will be fed back as part of the full Recovery Plan in July.

Equalities implications and risks:

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have 'due regard' to:

- (i) The need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (ii) The need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share protected characteristics and those who do not, and;
- (iii) Foster good relations between those who have protected characteristics and those who do not.

Note: 'Protected characteristics' are age, sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnerships, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment.

The Council is committed to all of the above in the provision, procurement and commissioning of its services, and the employment of its workforce. In addition, the Council is also committed to improving the quality of life and wellbeing for all Havering residents in respect of socio-economics and health determinants.

Whilst an EqHIA (Equality and Health Impact Assessment) is not a statutory requirement, it is usually carried out when a proposed or planned activity is likely to affect staff, service users, or other residents. It is acknowledged that due to the urgency of the need to restart services post the Covid-19 crisis, it will not be possible to carry out an EqHIA in advance of each re-opening. It is anticipated that the re-introduction of services is mainly a positive step, although managers will need to ensure equality, inclusion and dignity is promoted for all in all situations.

The Equality Impact Assessment also applies to staff and considers the particular circumstances of those with different protected characteristics. Workplace proposals will need to involve and communicate appropriately with workers whose protected characteristics might either expose them to a different degree of risk, or might make any steps we are considering inappropriate or challenging for them. Given the evidence of additional risk to BAME staff from Covid-19, an extra risk assessment will be undertaken as designed by the Director of Public Health. Each service recovery plan has a risk assessment which explicitly considers the risks and mitigations for all staff and requires a stronger focus on those believed to be at the an increased risk.

The Public Health England “Disparities in the risk and outcomes of Covid-19” research published on the 2nd June 2020, did not identify recommendations or a wider duty to consult with staff or residents.

Health and Wellbeing implications and Risks

As highlighted elsewhere in this Executive Decision, the health and wellbeing of staff and customers is a principal consideration in bringing the proposals forward. Key considerations include:

- Providing a safe and risk assessed working environment for those staff providing front line services to customers, plus for the customers themselves
- Risk assessing the activities of off-site workers in relation to their working arrangements including their welfare, mental and physical health and personal security and the safety of their clients and customers
- Monitoring the wellbeing of people who are working from home and helping them stay connected to the rest of the workforce, especially if the majority of their colleagues are on-site.
- Providing equipment for people to work at home safely and effectively, for example, remote access to work systems.
- Generally supporting staff who are having to deal with lockdown in their personal lives as well as their working ones.

The Government Recovery plans says that the “only feasible long-term solution lies with a vaccine or drug-based treatment”. The implications are that:-

“for the foreseeable future, workers should continue to work from home rather than their normal physical workplace, wherever possible. This will help minimise the

number of social contacts across the country and therefore keep transmissions as low as possible. All those who work are contributing taxes that help pay for the healthcare provision on which the UK relies. People who are able to work at home make it possible for people who have to attend workplaces in person to do so while minimising the risk of overcrowding on transport and in public places.”

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-commissioners-and-providers-of-services-for-people-who-use-drugs-or-alcohol>

However, working from home is not feasible for many Council staff and there needs to be interaction with service users. Full risk assessments are required to ensure as far as possible both staff and service users are protected from catching Covid-19.

For residents, participation in health and wellbeing activities provided through Council services is recognised as having positive benefits, including physical and mental health wellbeing. Such services are considered important in assisting residents resume to a new kind of normal.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None