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# Covid & Recovery Task & Finish Group – Final Report

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<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Scrutiny Commission
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	24 September 2024
<b>Task &amp; Finish Group Chairman:</b>	Councillor Paul Dick
<b>Date Head of Service agreed report:</b> <i>(for Corporate Board)</i>	
<b>Date Task &amp; Finish Group agreed report:</b>	15 July 2024
<b>Report Author:</b>	Gordon Oliver

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## 1 Purpose of the Report

This report presents the work of the Covid and Recovery Task and Finish Group, which sought to identify lessons learned from the local response to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent recovery. The report makes recommendations based on the evidence gathered, which (if implemented) would improve preparedness for a future event.

## 2 Recommendation(s)

To consider the Task and Finish Group’s recommendations as outlined in Section 6 of this report and agree whether these should be referred to the Executive for consideration.

## 3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	There are no financial implications arising directly from this report, although if the Task and Finish Group’s recommendations are accepted, this may result in financial implications which will be assessed in detail if they are taken forward.
<b>Human Resource:</b>	There are no HR implications arising directly from this report, although if the Task and Finish Group’s recommendations are accepted, this may result in HR implications, which will be assessed in detail if they are taken forward.

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<b>Legal:</b>	There are no Legal implications arising directly from this report, although if the Task and Finish Group’s recommendations are accepted they may result in Legal implications which will be assessed in details if they are taken forward.			
<b>Risk Management:</b>	There are no risk management implications arising directly from this report, although if the Task and Finish Group’s recommendations are accepted, this may result in risk management implications, which will be assessed in detail if they are taken forward.			
<b>Property:</b>	There are no property implications arising directly from this report, although if the Task and Finish Group’s recommendations are accepted, this may result in property implications, which will be assessed in detail if they are taken forward.			
<b>Policy:</b>	There are no policy implications arising directly from this report, although if the Task and Finish Group’s recommendations are accepted, this may result in policy implications, which will be assessed in detail if they are taken forward.			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		There are no equalities implications arising directly from this report. However, if accepted, proposals may have a positive impact on addressing health inequalities in the event of a future influenza type pandemic.

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<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		The proposed decision does not have any impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics. However, if accepted, the Task and Finish Group's recommendations may improve the response to a future pandemic for people with disabilities and other ethnic minority groups who were disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.
<b>Environmental Impact:</b>		X		There are no environmental impacts arising directly from this report.
<b>Health Impact:</b>		X		There are no health impacts arising directly from this report, although if the Task and Finish Group's recommendations are accepted, this may result in improvements to the local response to a future influenza type pandemic.
<b>ICT Impact:</b>		X		There are no ICT impacts arising directly from this report.
<b>Digital Services Impact:</b>		X		There are no impacts for Digital Services arising directly from this report.
<b>Council Strategy Priorities:</b>		X		There are no Council Strategy Priorities arising from this report, although if the Task and Finish Group's recommendations are accepted, this may result in improvements to provision of mental health support, which is captured within Priority 2: A Fairer West Berkshire with Opportunities for All.
<b>Core Business:</b>		X		Improving risk management and preparedness for a future event is part of the core business of delivering services.
<b>Data Impact:</b>		X		There are no data impacts associated with this report.

<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	<p>A full list of stakeholders and expert witnesses consulted is contained in the Task and Finish Group’s report.</p> <p>The following officers have been consulted on the report’s recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Paul Coe (Executive Director – Adult Social Care)</li><li>• Joseph Holmes (Executive Director – Resources)</li><li>• April Peberdy (Interim Service Director – Communities and Wellbeing)</li><li>• Carolyn Richardson (Service Manager – Joint Emergency Planning Unit)</li><li>• Martin Dunscombe (Communications Manager)</li><li>• Fiona Simmonds (Education Place Planning Team Leader)</li></ul>
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## 4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 This report presents the work undertaken by the Task and Finish Group set up by the Scrutiny Commission to review the local response to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent recovery, and the recommendations arising from that review.
- 4.2 Members of the Scrutiny Commission are invited to review the recommendations and consider whether these should be put to the Executive.

## 5 Supporting Information

### Introduction

- 5.2 At its meeting on 14 September 2023, the Scrutiny Commission agreed the terms of reference and membership for a Task and Finish Group to undertake a review of the local response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent recovery and develop recommendations for lessons learned that could be applied to similar future events.
  - 5.3 The review focused on five core areas:
    - (1) Local resilience and preparedness for the pandemic
    - (2) Public health and emergency community support
    - (3) Support for local businesses
    - (4) Support for the education sector
    - (5) Support for the care sector
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5.4 A copy of the Task and Finish Group’s terms of reference is provided in the Task and Finish Group’s report (Appendix A).

**Background**

5.5 The Task and Finish Group met seven times between October 2023 and June 2024 to hear evidence from expert witnesses in relation to all five aspects of the review. These included Council officers (including former officers) and representatives from partner organisations who supported in delivery of the local response.

5.6 Members were keen to get the perspectives of representatives from organisations who were recipients of the services provided by the Council to understand how they viewed the response. Witnesses were interviewed from the business, education and adult social care sectors. A full list of witnesses is provided in the Task and Finish Group’s report (Appendix A).

5.7 The Task and Finish Group also undertook primary research via online surveys of the local business community, headteachers, and town/parish councils and community groups. The survey findings are provided in the Task and Finish Group’s report (Appendix A)

5.8 Through evaluation of this evidence base and with technical support from officers, Members have been able to highlight a number of issues and pinpoint where potential improvements could be made, or where further work would be beneficial.

**6 Proposals**

6.1 The Task and Finish Group has developed a set of recommendations as set out below. Subject to the approval of the Scrutiny Commission, these recommendations will be referred to Executive for consideration on 7 November 2024 accompanied by a management response.

**Part 2a: Public Health and Emergency Community Support**

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Lead</b>
1	For the West Berkshire Chief Executive and his counterpart in the NHS, as a matter of urgency, to review the strengths and weaknesses in communications between the two organisations during the pandemic, and identify improvements or where better practice is needed.	WBC Chief Executive / Integrated Care Board Chief Executive
2	Do more to open channels of communication with key groups through: a) Building and maintaining a social media cascade to improve the reach of pandemic related communications and engagement of partners, particularly town/parish councils and local community groups.	Comms / Public Health/ Business Development Team

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	<p>b) Using Community Champions (trusted community representatives) to improve engagement with seldom heard communities, assist with communication of key messaging, and provide feedback about concerns within those communities.</p> <p>c) Building and maintaining a database of rural businesses in order to improve communications in the event of a future pandemic.</p>	
3	Provide regular hardcopy updates to cater for those residents who are not digitally enabled.	Comms
4	Review HR processes for sourcing additional staff resources during a pandemic with a focus on minimising delays, including recruitment of external staff, as well as rapid redeployment of Council staff where they are urgently required and restoring them to their original roles when no longer needed.	HR
5	Utilise Crest (or similar) for case logging from the outset of any future pandemics and consider greater use of Power BI and/or AI tools to help map virus transmission/outbreaks	All Services

### Part 2b – Emergency Community Support

Ref	Proposal	Lead
6	Consider how the voluntary sector could best be involved in the Gold, Silver, and Bronze command structure for future pandemic events.	Corporate Leadership Team
7	Ensure that all relevant emergency processes (including those developed by schools) are collated within a single repository and kept under review.	Joint Emergency Planning Unit

### Part 3 Supporting Local Businesses

Ref	Proposal	Lead
8	<p>Seek to harmonise discretionary funding schemes with other Berkshire local authorities with support from the Berkshire Prosperity Board, ensuring that any gaps in coverage are addressed in future schemes.</p> <p>Also, seek to identify and allocate staffing resources for grant administration in advance rather than reactively.</p>	Finance / Economic Development Team/ Corporate Leadership Team
9	Contact the other Berkshire local authorities to ask if they have undertaken a similar post-Covid review and if they would be willing to share their findings.	Corporate Leadership Team

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10	Ensure that all relevant services coordinate to provide a single set of definitive advice about any temporary measures to support recovery (e.g., outdoor seating for pubs, cafés, and restaurants), taking a pragmatic approach wherever possible.	Licensing / Highways / Public Health
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### Part 4 - Supporting the Education Sector

Ref	Proposal	Lead
11	Recruit temporary staff to provide additional cover for school support at the outset of any future pandemic – the level of support should be defined in future updates to pandemic/influenza plans.	Corporate Leadership Team / Education
12	Undertake a formal review to understand what measures were/were not effective for secondary schools (e.g. 'bubble' arrangements and movement of pupils around schools) to ensure that schools learn from best practice.	Joint Emergency Planning Unit/ Education
13	Review the mental health support available to headteachers and school staff.	Education

### Part 5 - Supporting the Care Sector

Ref	Proposal	Lead
14	Consider what support unpaid carers might need during a pandemic and put a suitable plan together.	Adult Social Care
15	Review PPE policies to ensure that adequate stocks are held to meet local demand for an initial period (at least 4 weeks) while national supply systems are set up.	Joint Emergency Planning Unit
16	Challenge government guidance where it is not in the best interest of residents (e.g., discharge of patients from hospitals to care homes).	Corporate Leadership Team
17	Consider how the Council and care sector organisations could provide better peer support, sharing intelligence and best practice, and make provision for this within pandemic/influenza plans.	Adult Social Care
18	Add parents/carers of adults with learning difficulties to the Hub's contact list to ensure they receive adequate support.	Adult Social Care/ PPP

## 7 Other options considered

The Scrutiny Commission may choose to accept the Task and Finish Group’s recommendations in full or in part, or amend the recommendations before putting them to the Executive. Alternatively, the Scrutiny Commission may choose not to put any of the report’s recommendations to the Executive if it considers that they are not appropriate.

## 8 Conclusion

- 8.1 The proposals outlined in Section 6 above have been agreed by the Task and Finish Group, based on the evidence presented. It is considered that these would help to improve the Council’s preparedness for a subsequent pandemic event and any subsequent response.
- 8.2 While some of these proposals could be actioned relatively quickly, at minimal cost and with existing resources, it is recognised that others would have financial and resource implications.

## 9 Appendices

Appendix A – Task and Finish Group Report

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### Corporate Board’s recommendation

\*(add text)

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### Background Papers:

None

### Subject to Call-In:

Yes:  No:

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval  | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council                              | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Delays in implementation could compromise the Council’s position  | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Item is Urgent Key Decision   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Report is to note only  | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
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**Wards affected:** All wards

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<b>Document Ref:</b>		<b>Date Created:</b>	
<b>Version:</b>		<b>Date Modified:</b>	
<b>Author:</b>			
<b>Owning Service</b>			

**Change History**

<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Change ID</b>
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