

## **Divisions Affected - All**

### **CABINET**

**15 MARCH 2022**

## **COVID 19: Oxfordshire System Recovery and Renewal Framework and COVID Programme Grants Utilisation Update**

### **Report by the Interim Chief Executive**

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**1. The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:**

- a) Adopt the Oxfordshire System Recovery and Renewal Framework, as set out in Annex 1, as the key partnership document guiding joint programme planning beyond the COVID-19 pandemic period;
- b) Delegate final revisions to Oxfordshire System Recovery and Renewal Framework to the Interim Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, as partnership organisations complete their engagement and decision-making processes;
- c) Note the summary of utilisation of COVID Programme grants for the immediate COVID response, as set out in Annex 2.

## **Executive Summary**

2. Effective partnership working across Oxfordshire has been at the heart of the local system response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the national and local picture improves, system partners have developed a shared framework for Recovery and Renewal (see Annex 1) to move operational partnership working beyond the immediate COVID response phase. This document sets overarching common ambitions for the issues and themes that will be worked on together as organisations and the community learn from the pandemic. It aims to ensure that Oxfordshire is best placed to learn from and recover from the immediate impacts of the pandemic, to support the long-term renewal of communities and places, and enhance our joint impact on national and international challenges.
3. National funding for the immediate COVID response has been split into a set of grant streams. As the immediate response phase comes to an end, this report includes an update on the utilisation of COVID grants within the corporate COVID programme.

## Background

4. System partners have worked closely together since early in 2020 to deliver a joined-up response across the broad spectrum of COVID-19 impact. Partners have developed joint structures to support those required to stay at home, to encourage and enforce adherence to COVID restrictions, to monitor and contain the spread of the virus and to maintain the continuity of essential services. Joint responses have managed the impact on health and social care services and worked closely with education providers. From later in 2020 and into 2021, joint activity delivered community testing and latterly the successful roll out of the vaccination programme. Partnership interventions have also sought to address the secondary impacts of the pandemic for individuals, communities and businesses, through joint work on community engagement, business support, financial hardship and economic recovery. An important enabler to effective partnership working has been the collaborative management of resources held in different parts of the system.
5. Throughout 2021, Oxfordshire's system-wide COVID-19 response continued to focus on the immediate health impacts of the pandemic, containing outbreaks and minimising the transmission of the virus in the community within the overall national pandemic situation. In line with the easing of most legal restrictions during the summer of 2021, system-partners revisited the long-term impact of COVID-19 and reviewed the shared focus of planning for recovery and renewal.
6. The pandemic has led to economic, community and service impact that has yet to be fully understood at the system level. However, it can clearly be seen that existing inequalities and service and community pressures have been amplified, with likely long-term impacts. As with many pre-existing challenges, the impact and effective responses will often lie across several agencies and sectors.
7. To coordinate and prioritise COVID and post-COVID activity, and prioritise resource allocation, partners agreed to develop a set of joint themes for the next phase in the pandemic period and to bring together shared system priorities and joint ambitions for recovery and renewal in an overarching framework.
8. This framework was initially drafted during late 2021 through engagement with system partners, drawing on priorities, impact analysis and community insight held within individual organisations and thematic partnerships. Progress was paused during December to allow partners to focus on the enhanced response to the Omicron variant and the framework is now being brought forward for formal adoption and incorporation into partnership planning for the new business year.

## Introducing the framework

9. The intention of agreeing a joint framework is to provide a mechanism for driving systems working on renewal and an ongoing structure for collaboration. It will enable us to better coordinate how we recover from the impacts of COVID and implement changes in the light of what we have learnt for our communities, organisations and partnerships.

10. At the time of writing, the significant increase in infection rates related to the Omicron variant is waning. While service pressure in health and social care remains significant and the impact on educational settings remains high, system partners are stepping back from the period of most concern and it has been announced that national statutory restrictions are being lifted. Nevertheless, the potential for changes in the nature of the pandemic and for service disruption generated by the cumulative risks associated with COVID's direct and indirect impact remains. Therefore, while planning for the future, a level of COVID readiness will need to be maintained. Reflecting this position, the framework for recovery and renewal is arranged around three headline aims:
- **Consolidating recovery and building resilience:** Protecting key services and keeping social life and the economy open by sustaining our system response to COVID-19 and working together on addressing new pressures. This includes changes to service delivery as well as ways of working eg. engagement with Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), businesses and partners.
  - **Addressing the unequal impact of COVID-19:** Proactively using qualitative and quantitative data and insight to identify the groups most impacted across a range of cross-cutting issues, beyond the immediate impact on health, and tackling impact with a focus on the total strengths and needs of individuals and families
  - **Supporting renewal:** Identifying new approaches and activities underpinned by the lessons we have learnt to date, building Oxfordshire's resilience, not only against future waves of the pandemic but also in terms of economic and community resilience to wider societal challenges including climate change and ecological impacts.
11. Across the three themes, two cross cutting priorities are recognised as needing to inform recovery and renewal thinking across the county:
- **Climate change action**  
Championing climate action across the County as we work together to address climate change, build climate resilience and support nature recovery.
  - **Tackling inequality**  
Driving equal access and delivery of support across all local communities, narrowing health, social and educational inequalities and tackling poverty.
12. The full framework document is available at Annex 1 and is summarised in the figure below:



*Fig 1. Recovery and renewal summary.*

13. This document is necessarily a start point for longer term planning. Its aim is to act as a bridge between the current immediate partnership COVID response, delivery and planning, and future longer-term planning across the partnership agenda. It seeks to bring together, rather than replace, existing county-wide plans and strategies and ensure that recovery and renewal activities are incorporated into the wider partnership context.

### **Contributing to the greener, fairer, healthier agenda**

14. The Council's new Strategic Plan for 2022-2025 was agreed at Council on 8 February, 2022, supported by a consultation and engagement exercise. The plan sets out how the County Council will work in partnership to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier place. The plan's nine priorities are to:
- Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work
  - Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire
  - Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents
  - Support carers and the social care system
  - Invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network
  - Preserve and improve access to nature and green spaces
  - Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential
  - Play our part in a vibrant and participatory local democracy

- Work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit
15. Through the agreement of shared ambitions within the broader partnership system, the Recovery and Renewal Framework presents the opportunity to develop and focus partnership delivery, including against the nine priorities of the new Strategic Plan. It represents a model of how the Council can advance its agreed priorities through influencing partners.
  16. Lessons learnt from the COVID period, both on the needs of the community and on ways of working in partnership, are contributing directly to the outcomes targeted in the new Council Strategy. For example, the digital inclusion strategy, new focus on disadvantage and deprivation, including food poverty, and business recovery, are being progressed using the networks and relationships developed through the COVID period. The role of the whole system in delivering improvements in health, care and wellbeing in the broadest sense - the highest priority for residents ahead of agreement of the 2022-2025 budget – is prominent throughout the Recovery and Renewal framework. Progress on the agendas where the Council leads will be most effective where we work in partnership to apply our shared approaches of prevention, joined-up local services and the empowerment of communities and individuals. The joint approach set out in the Recovery and Renewal Framework offer strategic opportunities to further this collaborative approach.

## **Next Steps**

17. The Oxfordshire COVID response system comprises health, local authority, education and community safety participants alongside representatives of strategic partnerships, including OxLEP. These partners connect to a broader network of key deliverers including schools, businesses, town and parish councils and the voluntary and community sector. Core system partners have agreed to adopt the joint Recovery and Renewal framework starting with local authorities, where recommendations to adopt the framework will be made to the relevant decision makers during March 2022. Significant engagement with system partners has already taken place. However, where additions and revisions are requested through the decision-making process, this report recommends that agreement to a final published version is delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

## COVID Grants Programme

18. In addition to the use of local resources, and nationally provided general revenue support, the Council has been grant funded by Government for specific elements of the COVID response. Where these funds are for specific, directorate led interventions these grants have been managed through directorate arrangements. This includes funding that has been required to be passed to Adult Social Care providers to support infection control measures and grant funding to support outbreak control and local contact tracing, which has been managed by Public Health. Updates on the use of this funding are included in Annex C to the Business Management & Monitoring Report elsewhere on the agenda.
19. A further core set of grants related to the immediate pandemic response is managed in the corporate COVID Response Programme. These have funded interventions delivered across the council and by partner organisations. These grants are:
  - The Contain Outbreak Management Fund
  - The Clinically Extremely Vulnerable Grant
  - The Practical Support Payment
  - The COVID Winter and COVID Local Support Grant and
  - The Household Support Fund
  - The Community Testing Grant
20. The terms of these grants have required their use for the immediate response to COVID, with different specific terms and conditions attached to each of the funds.
21. As the immediate response period comes to an end, the details of each grant scheme and the utilisation made of the funding is summarised in Annex B. The COVID Response Programme is now consolidating the programme status ahead of financial year-end and planning for what COVID activity will be ongoing, what will continue in an adapted form and what will cease, in the light of the emerging national direction. This approach is in-line with the Recovery and Renewal framework's enabling measure of retaining proportionate and flexible capacity to respond to the changing nature of COVID and will allow further allocation of the remaining COVID resources for future reporting to Cabinet.

## Financial Implications

22. Development of the Recovery and Renewal Framework was met within existing resource designated for COVID-19 programme management and funded from dedicated government grant.
23. The Recovery and Renewal Framework does not in itself direct resources and so while organisations are asked to adopt the framework as a strategic document within their policy making frameworks, there is no direct financial impact.

24. The COVID Programme grant streams set out in Annex B are funded by ring-fenced government funding streams and can only be used in line with nationally issued grant determination letters. The costs of administration of the COVID Programme itself are met from within the grant funds. The usage of COVID grants throughout the pandemic period has been formally reported through monthly business management reporting arrangements.

*Comments checked by:*

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## **Legal Implications**

25. There are no legal implications in this report.

*Comments checked by:*

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## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

26. The Recovery and Renewal framework outlines the unequal impact of COVID and notes the need for detailed analysis to fully understand the direct and indirect impacts in the short, medium and long term. Activity already underway under system structures, for example on health inequality, vaccine outreach and support to homeless individuals, is directly addressing equality and inclusion as it relates to COVID-19. In the development and delivery of the ambitions set out within the framework and the progression of new partnership planning and activity, detailed equality impact will be required building on the new learning and impact from the COVID-19 period supported through re-analysis of data and information, for example within the updated Joint Strategy Needs Assessment and in the annual report of the Director of Public Health.

Stephen Chandler  
Interim Chief Executive

Annex A: Oxfordshire Recovery and Renewal Framework, March 2022

Annex B: COVID Corporate Grant Funding Utilisation Summary

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