

Finance Panel

Meeting Venue
Teams Live

Meeting Date
Monday, 28 September 2020

Meeting Time
2.00 pm

For further information please contact
Lisa Richards

lisa.richards@powys.gov.uk



County Hall
Llandrindod Wells
Powys
LD1 5LG

121 September 2020

The use of Welsh by participants is welcomed. If you wish to use Welsh please inform us by noon, two working days before the meeting

AGENDA

1.	APOLOGIES
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To receive apologies for absence.

2.	NOTES
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To receive the notes of the last meeting.
(Pages 3 - 6)

3.	RECOVERY PLANNING
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To consider the report of the Leader.
(Pages 7 - 32)

4.	ACCESS TO INFORMATION
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The Monitoring Officer has determined that category 3 of the Access to Information Procedure Rules applies to the following items. His view on the public interest test (having taken account of the provisions of Rule 14.8 of the Council's Access to Information Rules) was that to make this information public would disclose information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). These factors in his view outweigh the public interest in disclosing this information. Members are asked to consider these factors when determining the public interest test, which they must decide when considering excluding the public from this part of the meeting.

5.	BRIEFING NOTE - FINANCIAL FORECAST
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To consider a briefing report by the Head of Finance.
(Pages 33 - 76)

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FINANCE PANEL HELD AT ON THURSDAY, 30 JULY 2020

PRESENT

Mr J Brautigam (Chair), County Councillors JG Morris, A W Davies, J Gibson-Watt, J Pugh, P Roberts, E Vaughan, D A Thomas and G I S Williams

Officers: Jane Thomas, Head of Finance

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors M J Dorrance (other Council business) and R G Thomas

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. FINANCIAL OVERVIEW AND FORECAST

Documents:

- Financial Overview and Forecast as at 30 June 2020

Discussion:

- The report shows the position as at 30 June 2020
- An initial assessment of the impact of Covid 19 had been made in early May. Since then there has been considerable movement alongside discussions with the Welsh Government and WLGA
- The situation remains fluid with restrictions being eased and services beginning to resume work
- At the end of Q1 the revenue budget is £10.7M overspent
- Modelling this forward, the projected year end is estimated at an overspend of £13M excluding school delegated budgets and the HRA
- A claim of £1M has been submitted to the Welsh Government for quarter 1 to cover lost income from car parking, waste, cultural services and school meals.
- Further areas are likely to be supported and this will improve the forecast
- To date £5.73M of the approved cost reductions for 2020/21 have been achieved with a further £2.2M assured of delivery. Heads of Service have been asked to identify proposals that will limit the budget deficit for their service. Proposals will be submitted for consideration in early September.
- The Capital Programme will be reviewed to assess what has been delayed or what could be delayed or stopped.
- EMT and Cabinet will now focus on developing the budget proposals. The MTFs and four-year budget plan will need to be reviewed and the scenario modelling updated to recalculate the remaining budget gap. This work will be undertaken through August.

- The Head of Finance was asked if she could estimate the effect of business rates on the budget. During the current year, the pooling arrangements will protect the Authority and any impact will fall on the Welsh Government. This is an issue across Wales which the Welsh Government will have to consider in their budget planning, there may be an impact on the Revenue settlement in next year.
- The reserves position with schools was noted. Significant overspends were forecast in some schools and it was questioned whether this is a structural issue or whether schools needed to adapt. School budgets had been delayed due to the pandemic, but their proposals are under review. The figures reported are likely to change but there should be more clarity by September. Repayment of loans may be extended where an appropriate recovery plan is in place. The Chair of the Learning and Skills Committee asked if any costs could be reclaimed where cost reductions had not been implemented because of the pandemic – the Head of Finance confirmed that there was no provision to reclaim such costs.
- It was suggested that the Authority should be proactive with the third sector in offering support to alleviate pressures in paying Council Tax. Council Tax collection rates had declined in April but had picked up in May and again in June. Reduced collection rates are being discussed with the Welsh Government. The Council Tax Reduction Scheme supports residents who have lower levels of income and take up has increased, this pressure falls on the Councils budget.
- Pressures of £4.25M were noted as unfunded – the Head of Finance was asked if these were directly attributable to the pandemic or had they been previously identified. There was an element of both but included increased demand particularly in Social Care. This figure is likely to change.
- It was proposed that reserves should be used to protect the Authority from the overspend rather than cut services or increase Council Tax. The Panel was reminded that some reserves were specific and whilst these could be reviewed, it could impact upon revenue and borrowing requirements. This would be a discussion when it became clearer whether services would be able to balance their budgets. The need for future financial resilience was also noted. The Portfolio Holder cautioned that the new financial year could not be started with reserves severely depleted. Some use of reserves had already been identified to support current service delivery.
- 2% pay award had been factored into the current budget but this was likely to be increased. The teachers' pay award had not yet been agreed and it was not yet certain that any increase would be funded.
- £78M had been set aside by the Welsh Government to support loss of income across all Welsh authorities
- In response to a question regarding checks made on transport operators where drivers may have been furloughed, it was confirmed that specific guidelines were in place with a detailed reconciliation taking place monthly to ensure that payments being made were appropriate
- The Panel asked if any data modelling had been undertaken regarding reducing prices to increase uptake of services such as school meals and car parking? Changes to existing policies would impact on the level of support provided by Welsh Government.

4.	CAPITAL REPORT
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Documents:

- Report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance

Discussion:

- The revised working budget is £121M
- There will be a reprofiling of schemes between years
- Work stopped on many projects during the pandemic and the need to borrow has fallen. This will have an impact on the revenue budget and may offset some of the deficit
- The revenue budget indicates that £12M is used to support the capital programme – however, this includes expenditure incurred in previous years
- The projects included or proposed changes to the capital programme should be considered by the appropriate scrutiny committee. Heads of Service were currently reviewing their schemes within the capital programme
- Five child-care and early years sites were being developed – two of which were at school sites which had excess capacity. This should be considered for delay until such time as there is clarity on the schools' transformation programme. The Education Service are aware of the need to align capital spend with future plans.
- £950K was identified for replacement and further preventative work at Brecon Swimming Pool. There was concern that this may become prohibitively expensive if further works were identified. The schemes were all supported by appropriate business cases to warrant their inclusion in the programme.
- The Head of Finance confirmed that the capital receipts budget would not be exhausted by year end and was expected to support transformation for a few more years

5.	SAVINGS TRACKER
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Documents:

- Savings tracker

Discussion:

- It was noted that significant savings were to be made in both Adults and Children's Services
- Some businesses were being asked to repay grants that had been awarded. Members asked what measures were in place to ensure that legitimate businesses were receiving grants? The initial instruction by Welsh Government had been to make the payments as swiftly as possible. The Authority wrote to all legitimate businesses on their database explaining the criteria. Systems and controls were already in place to limit the opportunity for fraudulent claims and prevent duplicate payments. SWAP is supporting the process and will undertake some review work shortly. Audit Committee would receive a report in due course.

6.	DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS
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The Panel discussed whether there should be a meeting earlier in September to consider service budget proposals. The Head of Finance was expecting submission of proposals early in September, but these would not be ready for consideration until late in the month.

Dates for future meetings would be as follows:

- 28 September 2020 – 2pm
- 29 October 2020 – 10am
- 27 November 2020 – 10 am
- 17 December 2020 – 2pm

Mr J Brautigam (Chair)

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

CABINET EXECUTIVE
15 September 2020

REPORT AUTHOR: Councillor Rosemarie Harris
Leader

REPORT TITLE: Powys Recovery Planning

REPORT FOR: Decision / Discussion / Information

1. Purpose

To seek approval for the Council's Strategic response and recovery plans to the pandemic.

2. Background

2.1 In March 2020 the Council invoked its Business Continuity Plan to respond to the extraordinary challenges presented by novel coronavirus (COVID-19). This meant that a range of services were either adapted, suspended or, in some instances, established for the first time.

2.2 In accordance with the latest advice and guidance issued by Public Health Wales and UK/Welsh Government, the following principles (as detailed in figure 1) established by the Cabinet have informed our response to COVID-19:

- Responding to COVID-19
- Keeping our communities safe and resilient
- Running the Council.

2.3 Most council services have been operating on a business continuity footing, with essential front-line services being in operation and staff working from home wherever possible.

Figure 1 – Our COVID-19 response

OUR COVID-19 RESPONSE

CORONAVIRUS HAS HAD AN UNPRECEDENTED IMPACT ON LIFE AS WE KNOW IT. We're here to help Powys through these difficult times. As an open and enterprising council, we have embraced new ways of working and delivering services. **WE ARE WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES, RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES TO HELP GET POWYS ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY.**

For more information please visit www.powys.gov.uk/coronavirus

1 RESPONDING TO COVID-19

ADULT SOCIAL CARE working with the health board to support those with the virus, providing care at home and residential care.

CHILD CARE establishing safe child care for key workers and vulnerable children.

CONTINUITY OF LEARNING ensuring pupils continue to learn and have access to educational resources and support.

Reopening our **SCHOOLS**

HOMELESSNESS people who are homeless (sofa surfing or rough sleeping) need to be brought indoors and adequately housed.

PUBLIC PROTECTION maintaining public health which includes enforcing closures of premises where necessary, and managing regional contact tracing.

2 KEEPING OUR COMMUNITIES SAFE AND RESILIENT

Providing care and support for **EXTREMELY VULNERABLE RESIDENTS**

SUPPORTING BUSINESSES and the self-employed in line with Welsh Government guidance.

Providing **REFUSE AND RECYCLING** services including Household Waste Recycling Centres.

Maintaining an emergency **HOUSING REPAIRS** and maintenance service.

HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE ensuring essential repairs are carried out and an emergency response is available.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES ensuring children are protected and safeguarded.

LIBRARIES re-opening in a phased manner.

3 RUNNING THE COUNCIL

FINANCIAL Management and Reporting.

CUSTOMER SERVICES AND COMMUNICATIONS ensuring that the public, our councillors and our staff are regularly updated and informed.

Maintaining our essential **CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES** including workforce, finance and ICT.

OUR VALUES

- Professional** Whatever role we play in the council, we act with professionalism and integrity
- Positive** We take a positive attitude in all we do
- Progressive** We take a proactive and responsible approach to planning for the future
- Open** We keep each other informed, share knowledge and act with honesty and integrity
- Collaborative** We work constructively and willingly on joint initiatives

Powys

2.4 On 15 May 2020 the Welsh Government set out their national framework 'Unlocking our Society and Economy'. This document outlines the reopening process, with restrictions being eased more quickly in some areas than others, based on advice from Public Health Wales.

2.5 The Welsh Government's framework makes clear that the environment within which the Council will be delivering services, and within which the economy must operate, will for the foreseeable future involve: mandatory social distancing alongside a clear direction to work from home, where possible; the phased 'restart' of wide range of public services and of the economy; and continued proactive work to prevent the further spread of the virus whilst also planning for potential future 'peaks'.

2.6 This report sets out the critical challenges associated with restarting or repurposing council services to function effectively, sustainably and safely, and establishes the principles and planning assumptions to achieve the following goals:

- Deliver a balanced budget for 2020-21
- Clear Integrated Business Planning (IBP) objectives and actions for delivery between now and March 2021, that will enable us to deliver a balanced budget with minimal effort
- Effective budget planning for 2021-2022
- New and revised IBP Objectives for 2021-2024, that embrace the new opportunities presented by the current pandemic
- An updated Corporate Improvement Plan (CIP), with key transformation/improvement objectives for delivery between April 2021 – March 2025, with a focus on our five new outcomes

- An effective balance between Business Continuity Planning and Recovery Planning.

3. Advice

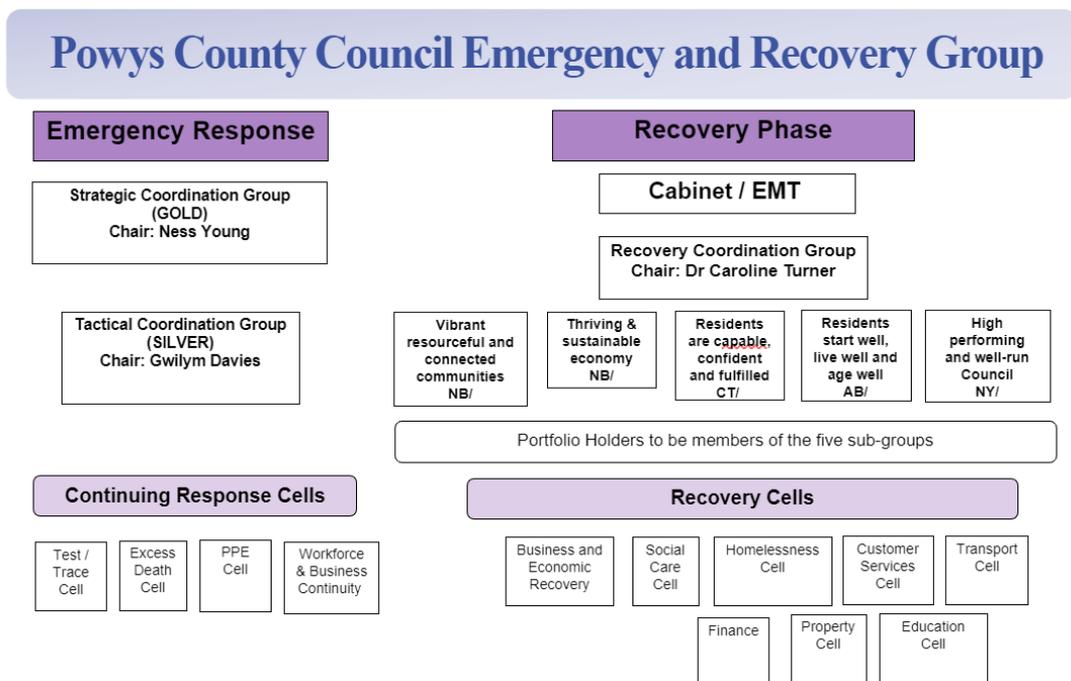
3.1 Internal – inward facing governance and approach

3.1.1 In May 2020, Senior Leadership Team discussed and recommended Strategic Aims of the recovery work and are now recommending these to the Cabinet:

- Minimise the risk to the population and council staff from COVID-19
- Co-ordinate the recovery of services and identify appropriate changes to our traditional ways of working
- Understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the council and the county
- Support communities and businesses to recover from the impact of 2020 emergencies (i.e. COVID-19 and flooding)
- Work with partners to develop and implement a robust recovery plan for the county.

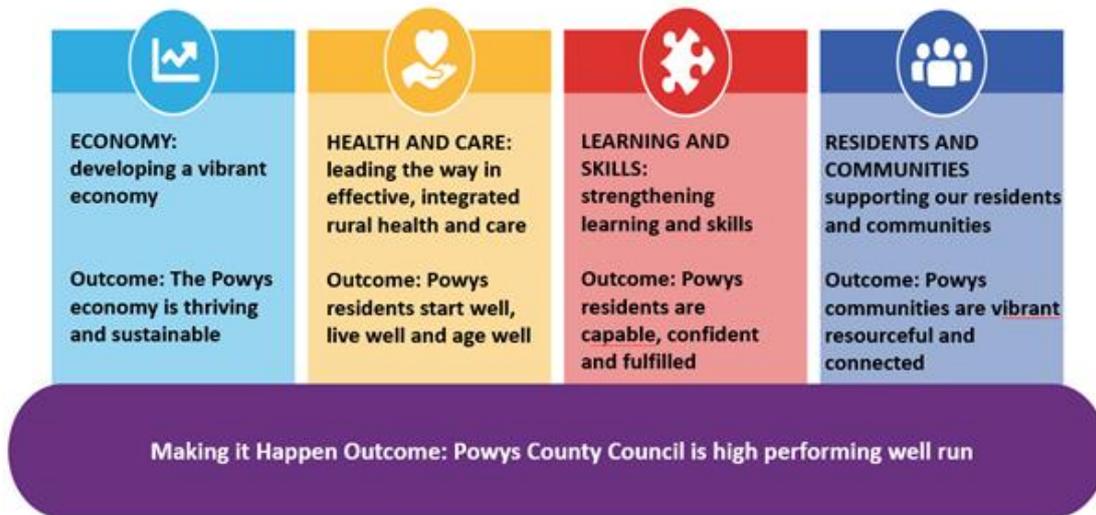
3.1.2 These aims aligned with the Local Resilience Forum 10 step recovery plan objectives and are overseen by the Council’s Recovery Co-ordination Group that reports directly to Cabinet and Executive Management Team as set out in figure 2 below.

Figure 2 – Powys County Council Emergency and Recovery Group



3.1.3 Five sub-groups have been operating, aligned to the five outcomes agreed by Cabinet (as detailed in the diagram above).

Figure 3 – Vision 2025 Well-being objectives and outcomes



3.1.4 In June 2020 the Transformation and Communications Service working collaboratively with all services conducted a COVID-19 [Impact Assessment](#). The insight that the Impact Assessment provides raises some significant areas of concern as highlighted in figure 4 below.

Figure 4 – Understanding the impact of COVID-19 in Powys ‘on a page’

Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 in Powys 'on a page'

In order to consider how Powys may look in the future, it is necessary to clearly see the current situation, what has changed or stayed the same and what this might mean for the County over the short (6 months), medium (1 year) and long term (5 years).

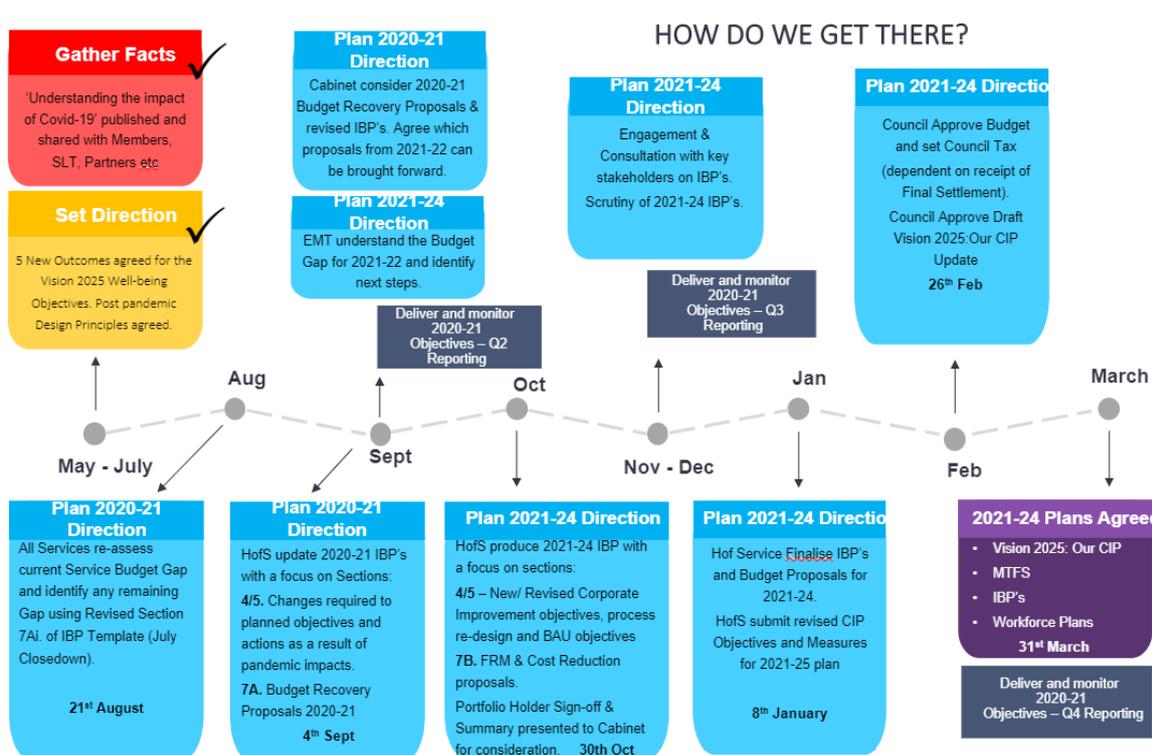
Category	Short term	Medium term	Long term
Economy	Business Support - £46.6m paid out to 4,020 businesses with a further support package to be made available for small charities in Powys	Employment trends - 23% of Powys' workforce (13,100 employees) furloughed. From March to May claimant count increased 156% (+2,225) in Powys	Impact on key sectors - Accommodation & food services have been the worst hit since COVID-19, with an estimated fall in GDP of 92%
Vibrant, connected & resourceful communities	Volunteers - 372 health and care volunteers across PCC and PTHB. 66% volunteer increase on powys.volunteering-wales.net	Community provided services - 5,504 vulnerable persons in Powys communities are recognised	Environmental impacts - massive reduction in airborne pollution, most noticeably reduction in Nitrogen Dioxide (NO2) and particulate matter
Residents start well, live well & age well	Referral numbers – Referrals to Adult social care increased by 11%. Children's referrals have reduced, mostly because of the schools closures (schools usually refer 10%) this could imply a safeguarding risk to young people	Homelessness and housing impacts – 112 homeless as at 29th May 2020, 119% increase compared to May 2019. 80% of those accommodated are single persons	
Capable, confident & fulfilled residents	Pupil and student trends – 16 childcare hubs, 307 pupils accessing, 1,413 devices and MIFI dongles distributed	Free school meals- 14% increase in students who are eligible, 20% increase in free school meal take up since Sept 2019	Well-being of pupils and students - Demand for children and young people's counselling service increased by 60 referrals since lockdown to 190 active cases
High Performing & well run council	Financial outlook for the council - potential £16m deficit for financial year 2020/21. 201 staff furloughed recouping £206k March-May	Service Performance Impacts – Significant changes to the way the council is operating. +1,100% daily VPN connections, +634% in Teams activity	Well-being of staff – 562 staff have responded so far. 66% staff reported they have increased productivity and 70% have better work/life balance

3.1.5 Major changes are being felt by residents and visitors, by those working in the private and public sector, businesses and care providers and by young and old alike. Many of these changes have been disconcerting, upsetting and unwelcome and their effect on the population of Powys will be felt for a long time. However, there have also been some positive alterations in the way many of us work and live, and change provides us with the opportunity to

consider whether, when life starts to return to normal, we might wish to grasp the opportunity to do some things differently and how that might be achieved.

3.1.6 As detailed in 2.6 above, we have defined clear goals that we, as an organisation are aiming to achieve. The timeline below sets out our actions and key milestones for achieving these goals.

Figure 5 – Roadmap to recovery



3.1.7 We have gathered the facts (see red box on diagram) and Cabinet have set the direction with the five new outcomes (yellow box). Now all services are working through a process of reassessment to position their recovery proposals for 2020-21 before budget panels in September 2020. It is anticipated that a balanced budget will encompass a blend of service proposals, Welsh Government Support, Capitalisation and use of Reserves. The proposals along with revised Integrated Business Plans 2020-2024 will be scrutinised by the Recovery Working Group ahead of any Council decision.

3.1.8 The democratic governance has truly embraced digital through these challenging times. The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020 amended legislation to allow fully virtual meetings to be held (existing legislation required 30% of members to be in physical attendance at the place of the meeting). This was to ensure that meetings and business could continue in an environment which was safe for elected members, officers and the public. Powys County Council was one of the first Councils in Wales to hold virtual meetings, and has been praised in a recent Wales Audit Office note "Powys County Council – Covid-19 learning and recovery – Observations from online committees and meetings" (July 2020). Further information is available at appendix one.

3.1.9 Whilst there were challenges in establishing virtual committee meetings, many of the original obstacles such as Councillors' use of the software, online voting and protocols for speaking during meetings have been resolved due to extensive training. There are a few issues which remain to be resolved such as simultaneous translation, including external presenters in meetings, and work is ongoing to resolve this. However the opportunities provided over the last few months should not be lost as there are major benefits in continuing this virtual way of working, and the future should be a mixture of some face to face meetings, with the majority of meetings undertaken virtually.

3.1.10 The benefits of holding virtual meetings include:

- Shorter, more focussed meetings
- Saving of time for Councillors and officers (both in terms of time to travel to and from meetings and in attending the meeting itself)
- Cost saving for the Council in terms of travelling costs as well as assisting the Council's green agenda
- Broadcasting more meetings to the public than previously undertaken e.g. scrutiny committees and planning committees broadcast live to the public
- Assisting the scrutiny process by undertaking "virtual" scrutiny using Teams where groups can scrutinise documents and record their comments using a Teams channel rather than an email exchange.

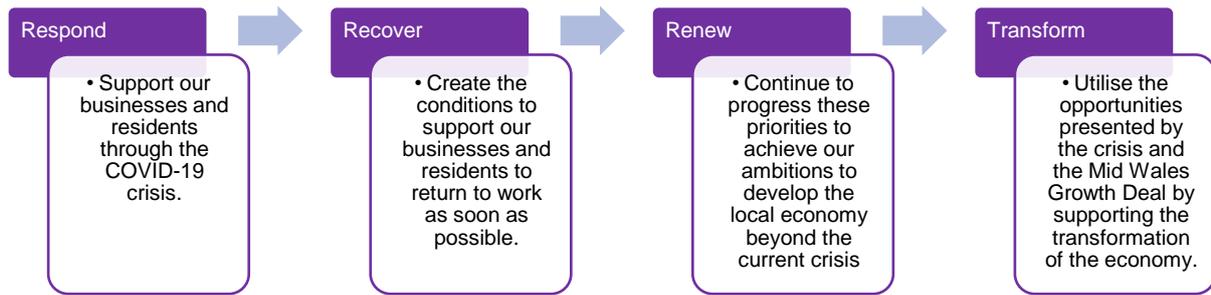
3.1.11 There are also opportunities to use this new way of working for other purposes such as using Teams Live Events for Member Development Sessions and engagement sessions within the Council using the moderated question and answer facility within the software. The ability to record these sessions for archived viewing is also beneficial at no additional cost of the Council.

3.1.12 Many of the opportunities, as outlined in the example above, will inform the revised Integrated Business Plans 2020-24 which all services will complete by 30th October 2020. In the interim, the temporary recovery co-ordination sub-groups will help to shape any Corporate and Service objectives for 2021-24, including COVID-19 recovery programme. Subsequently, Finance will review and update the Medium-Term Financial Strategy including the five-year budget plan and establish the revised budget gap.

3.2 Wider external context

3.2.1 COVID-19 has a profound impact on the economy of Powys. The virus has impacted household incomes and businesses in every sector, and its consequences will be felt for a long time. Whilst the pandemic provides an economic challenge like never experienced before, it also offers a window of opportunity to reshape the economy of Powys, leading to sustainable and resilient long-term growth. The Draft Powys Economic Recovery Strategy (Appendix 2) sets out a four-phase approach to economic recovery:

Figure 6 – Four-Phase Approach to Economic Recovery



3.2.2 We also conducted an online business survey from 11th June to 12th July 2020. There were a total of 1,016 respondents and detailed analysis of the findings can be seen at this link [Powys COVID-19 Business Survey 2020](#). The feedback received shows that many business owners across the county are battling hard to save their companies and are facing huge ongoing challenges. Key observations: more financial support is needed, lifting restrictions is key to recovery, small business' and sole traders feel overlooked, clear guidelines and timeframes are needed, and wider marketing of Powys as a tourist destination is required.

3.2.3 Since the survey was published the council has taken more action to support businesses and has directly addressed some of the key points made throughout the survey, including:

- Two hours free parking during summer holiday
- #SupportLocalPowys campaign
- A #DiscoverPowys tourism campaign to help attract visitors
- Processing over £50million in grant support to local businesses
- Free planning advice for businesses (tourism and hospitality).

3.2.4 Whilst recognising that we need to assist the wider economy the Council's must also focus on the delivery of front-line services. We continue to reassess the impact of COVID-19 on the provision of services. For instance, the impact of COVID-19 on the provision of daytime opportunities in Powys is part of understanding the phased restart of services and will feed into the revised Integrated Business Plan for Adult Social Care. This is just one example.

3.2.5 Cabinet are therefore asked to endorse the approach set out in section 3.1 and the Economic Recovery Strategy referenced in Section 3.2 (and available at appendix 2) covering both internal and external recovery and planning.

3.2.6 Cabinet are also asked to endorse the next steps which include, papers being provided to Cabinet on the future operation of Council meetings, a potential new operating model and changing the way we deliver frontline services.

4. Resource Implications

- 4.1 The Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer) notes the content of the report. The processes set out will enable the Council to clearly understand the impact of the pandemic on the councils financial position and build its financial plans for recovery, ensuring the delivery of a balanced budget for 2020-21 and sustainable budgets over the Medium Term.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 Legal : The recommendation can be supported from a legal point of view.
- 5.2 The Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) has commented as follows: “ I note the legal comment and have nothing to add to the report”.

6. Comment from local member(s)

- 6.1 The recovery and planning for the future is applicable countywide.

7. Integrated Impact Assessment

- 7.1 Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in Powys available at:

<https://sway.office.com/sxfU525TCBDFv9PE?ref=Link&loc=mysways>

8. Recommendation

- 8.1 That Cabinet endorse the approach set out in section 3.1 above and the Draft Economic Recovery Strategy referenced in Section 3.2 (and available at appendix 2) covering both internal and external recovery and planning.

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Email: emma.palmer@powys.gov.uk

Head of Service: Emma Palmer Head of Transformation and Communications

Corporate Director: Ness Young, Director of Resources and Transformation

Appendix one

Note from Audit Wales



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Note from Audit Wal

Appendix 2

Powys Economic Recovery Strategy

COVID-19 and the Government led containment measures have had a profound impact on the economy of Powys. The virus has impacted household incomes and businesses in every sector, and its consequences will be felt for a long time.

There has been an unprecedented scale of government investment which will continue to shape recovery. There will be no quick fix, social distancing and the need for personal protection equipment will be with us for some time, and will inevitably impact businesses as they attempt to resume trading. Given the severity of the crisis, it is prudent to plan for a recovery period of at least three to five years, and not to expect a rapid economic bounce back.

Although resilient at times of crisis, COVID-19 has placed further restrictions on rural areas such as Powys than ever before. The restrictions placed on personal travel for non-essential purposes will have had a greater impact on Powys than our urban counterparts, due to our greater dispersal of workplaces, consumer and business services, as well as our heavy reliance on the visitor economy. Whilst the impact of Coronavirus provides an economic challenge like we have never seen in our lifetimes, it also offers a window of opportunity to reshape the economy of Powys, leading to sustainable and resilient long-term growth.

Strategic Aims

1. Understand the impact of COVID-19 on the economy of Powys.
2. To develop and implement plans to mitigate against the impact of COVID-19, ensuring that these plans are aligned to the ambitions of the Mid Wales Growth Deal and other Welsh Government strategic priorities.
3. To work with partners to deliver economic recovery, including accessing funding and lobbying for additional funding/powers where necessary.
4. To maintain confidence and trust of the business community through communications and engagement.

Our recovery strategy will take a four-phases, noting that this is not necessarily a linear approach, and that timings have the potential to change based on external factors:

- Respond – support our businesses and residents through the COVID-19 crisis.
- Recover – create the conditions to support our businesses and residents to return to work as soon as possible.
- Renew – continue to progress these priorities to achieve our ambitions to develop the local economy beyond the current crisis.
- Transform – utilise the opportunities presented by the crisis and the Mid Wales Growth Deal by supporting the transformation of the economy to be an enterprising and distinctive region delivering economic growth driven by innovation, skills, connectivity and more productive jobs supporting prosperous and bilingual communities.

Our approach will follow the Powys County Council post-pandemic design principles, and more widely will ensure that we can deliver a strong, green, diverse, and resilient rural economy for the future.

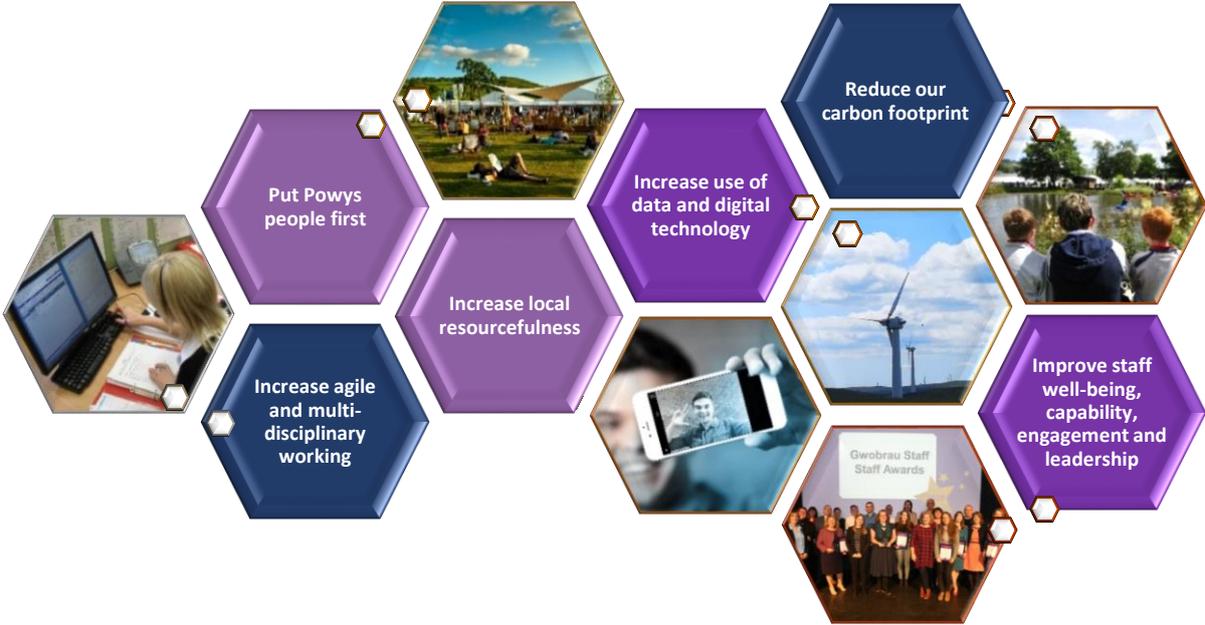


Figure 1: Powys County Council Post Pandemic Design Principles

Based on local intelligence gathering and collaboration with our partners, Powys County Council will remain agile in our response to COVID-19, particularly in response to any second outbreak of the virus. There is also the need that due to impacts of COVID-19 that Powys County Council and our partners may need to revise the Medium Term Financial Strategy and reconsider key areas of work, both of which will have an impact of the delivery of the strategy.

This strategy will support the ambitions of the Mid Wales Growth Deal and well as the Dyfed-Powys Local Resilience Forum Recovery Plan, and will be underpinned by the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

Collaboration and Partnership

For economic recovery to get underway collaboration and partnership is key, Powys County Council will need to collaborate and work closely with businesses and representative groups in our county to ensure that any interventions meet their needs. Locally, we will build on our strong relationships with the local Public Service Board to try to ensure that all public sector bodies are supporting local businesses, and the strengthening of the Powys Pound.

Relationships with both the Welsh and UK Governments (and their respective bodies – such as Business Wales) will be critical in the implementation of our economic recovery plan. All our local activity needs to be aligned with Welsh Government thinking about unlocking our economy, whilst protecting public health.

Through regular contact with both governments, we will ensure that they understand the needs of Powys businesses, and try to shape any future support mechanisms so that

Powys can fully benefit. Furthermore, the recovery strategy must be dynamic and responsive in order to adapt to a rapidly changing situation, and any national economic policy interventions.

Impact of COVID-19

As yet official statistics on the impact of COVID-19 on the Powys economy are limited, the pace of change has outstripped the ability of data collection to keep up, however this plan will be regularly updated to ensure that it is based on robust evidence and intelligence.

In addition to official statistics, Powys County Council is undertaking a survey of local businesses to ensure that the plan is fully informed by local evidence, and meets business needs today, and into the future.

Given the constraints of social distancing, the response to COVID-19 is likely to go on for some time. The process of recovery will be challenging but working with partners it is a chance to renew and transform the economy of Powys. Powys will need to find a new approach to continue to benefit from the international economy, something which is particularly important to our tourism businesses. Furthermore, utilising the potential of the Mid Wales Growth Deal we need to further develop our sectors which appear to have the greatest opportunities including digital, green energy, and food and drink.

Although the food supply chain has continued to function in the period of lockdown. With the closure of the food services sector farmgate prices for livestock crashed, and dairy farmers were having to pour their milk down the drain. Problems for the sector have been compounded by the fact that farmers have been unable to access some of the business support schemes introduced by the Welsh Government. In addition, due to livestock needing constant attention, they have also been unable to furlough staff.

Even with the unprecedented levels of government support the impact of COVID-19 is expected to be long lasting and felt for many years to come. Given the disruption of normal process of securing qualifications, seeking a job, apprenticeship or attending higher education, our young people are particularly vulnerable. The long-term economic impact of this disruption is unknown, but it is likely to exacerbate existing inequalities, with those already vulnerable being the hardest hit.

Powys Business Survey – full details of the survey available at:
<https://sway.office.com/r8fhUNN0sFCqljBD?ref=Link>

Opportunities

According to Investec COVID19 has seen people place far greater value on outside space, with people prioritising access to green space for the long-term benefit of mental and physical wellbeing. In May 2020 Savills reported a 25% increase in demand for viewing in the prime country market compared to May 2019. COVID19 has proven our abilities to work from home, people have become untethered from traditional workspaces, it is no longer necessary for people to cluster in city centres. This rural renaissance brings with it opportunities for Powys, people may seek to escape city living, bringing themselves, their businesses and families to the county. To capitalise on this improved connectivity, high speed rural broadband and mobile technologies will be a priority as part of this adaption to the post-COVID-19 world. Whilst home working will become more

mainstream, on occasions people will still have to commute to meetings, and therefore working with partners we will also seek to improve the transport infrastructure of Powys.

The lockdown period has demonstrated (particularly for office-based sectors) that remote working can and does work. Although some organisations have been moving towards this model for some time, COVID-19 has seen the pace of change increase exponentially. Remote working may be the default for some time, and this could impact future business investment decisions. It has been proven through the pandemic that businesses do not need to be centrally located. Some evidence suggests that there will be a shift in demand and that businesses are questioning the value of spending £50 per square foot for an office in part of London. For Powys, this brings with it a unique opportunity to encourage businesses to relocate, and benefit from rural living.

Local food networks have developed and even flourish in Powys with people staying local and shopping local. Some independent retailers and food businesses have changed their operational models to develop home delivery box schemes or direct sales. Although this can be challenging for small businesses, opportunities exist for them to develop this market and new digital delivery methods as part of their recovery.

The COVID-19 outbreak has brought the need for digital skills to the fore and shown the importance of online services. It has further reinforced the need to end the rural/urban connectivity divide. Powys County Council will use learnings from the pandemic alongside our Digital Strategy to further lobby for the continued roll out of fibre broadband and mobile connectivity.

The impact on the tourism and hospitality sector has been profound, with the CLA estimating that the impact on rural tourism income will be a third greater than experienced during the 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak (from which it took 5 years to recover). However, closure of state borders and reluctance of people to travel is likely to see a short term revitalisation of rural destinations. With the correct marketing a visitor messaging, this is something can be capitalised on for the longer term.

Opportunities exist through the promotion of the fact that rural holidays offer a combination of limited travelling time, smaller carbon footprint than a holiday abroad, health benefits of fresh air and outdoor activities, beautiful landscape and biodiversity, and easier social distancing than in cities.

Given our demographics as a county, Powys has a thriving care market which has never been so revered as a career as it is now. Traditionally hard to recruit too, the increased profile of care as a career brings with it the opportunity for greater recruitment and retention in the sector, and with the correct support for new entrants it will allow for this essential service to be delivered at a competitive price.

We are currently within the transition period where negotiations over our future relationships with the EU are taking place. Those businesses that rely on trading with countries within the EU, both for imports and exports and those reliant on EU workers will be impacted by these negotiations. Although there are risks, Britain's exit from the EU does present opportunities, and our future relationship with EU will be an important detriment of the success of the future Powys economy.

Phase 1 – Respond

	Detail
Impact Assessment	<p>Quantitative and qualitative information from trusted sources will be gathered and tracked to monitor the initial and ongoing impact of COVID-19 on the economy of Powys. The impact to the labour market will also be examined to consider any interventions needed (working with/lobbying UK/Welsh Government for funding).</p> <p>A specific Powys business survey will be undertaken so to examine the localised impacts of COVID-19. Data from which will be actively passed to government, to help them, and to lobby for specific interventions to support the Powys Economy.</p> <p>Identify where resources are needed to fill any gaps left by national programmes supporting business recovery, and lobbying Welsh/UK Government to fill these gaps.</p>
Government Programme (on behalf of Welsh Government)	<p>Powys County Council will continue to administer grant assistance to businesses and organisations in Powys. The funding package includes £10,000 grants to all businesses eligible for Small Business Rates Relief with a rateable value of £12,000 or less, and grants of £25,000 to businesses in the retail, leisure and hospitality sector with a rateable value of between £12,001 and £51,000.</p>
Business Rate Relief	<p>Revised business rate bills have been issued to businesses and organisations qualifying under the Retail, Leisure, Hospitality Rate Relief and Small Business Rate Relief Schemes.</p> <p>All retail, leisure, and hospitality businesses in Powys with a rateable value of less than £500,000 are receiving a year-long business rates holiday.</p>
Stimulus Actions	<p>Sustain confidence in the development market by continuing to encourage pre-planning discussions, and by progressing planning applications to decision.</p>
Business Advice	<p>A dedicated COVID-19 helpline for Powys businesses is in place, and weekly meetings are taking place with Business Wales, Welsh Government and</p>

	Department of Work & Pensions to help co-ordinate support and advice to businesses across Powys.
Regulated Support and Guidance	Powys County Council Trading Standards and Environmental Health will continue to provide support and advice to all Powys businesses in relation to their operations, reopening, and social distancing.
Procurement	<p>Powys County Council has accelerated payments to contractors and suppliers (now 10 days or less) to assist with their cashflow.</p> <p>Discussions have also been held with key contractors and suppliers surrounding COVID-19 issues, and advice given where appropriate.</p>

Phase 2 – Recover

Action	Detail
#SupportLocalPowys	<p>Powys County Council will implement a communications campaign to encourage residents to #SupportLocalPowys promoting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the traditional shops that are found on our high streets or in smaller communities that are either open currently or will be opening as restrictions begin to be relaxed. • Businesses that have an online presence/website so that people can order goods which will be delivered to their door or which can be collected by them at pre-arranged time slots during the continued social distancing requirements. <p>The campaign will encourage Powys communities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support and shop locally; now, and in the future. • wherever possible, support our local economy.
Discover Powys Safely	Powys County Council will launch a new tourism communications strategy 'Tourism Tomorrow', aligned to Visit Wales messaging aimed at visitors, the tourism sector, and local communities. The campaign will take three phases:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassure: messaging for a place of nurturing, empathy and compassion to build confidence. • Inspire: telling the stories of who we are, embedding connection and deeper understanding. • Renew: a collective commitment to respecting today for tomorrow. <p>#PurePowys will be an underlying principle of the campaign and will echo the beauty of our environment and society in its simplest, natural form, where the little things are values to create lasting memories and where respectful and responsible tourism is key for the visitors, sector and communities.</p>
Reprioritisation of existing externally funded projects	Powys County Council will work closely with Welsh Government to enable (where possible) existing externally funded projects/programmes to be repurposed to assist with recovery from COVID-19. Examples of which include Arwain, TRI, Town Centre Regeneration, Visit Wales Funding).
Powys Pound/Procurement	Even before the current crisis Powys County Council was committed to growing the local economy, including our ability to invest in the county and to accelerate activity through our financial resources. Even greater emphasis will now be placed on supporting local businesses through our organisational spend.
Employability Programmes/Skills for Recovery	Following the end of the UK Government furlough scheme, there is a risk that a Powys residents may become unemployed (those in tourism/hospitality are at particular risk). There will be a need to work with employers and training providers to develop an agile workforce with flexible skills, able to fill job vacancies. Initially this could be undertaken through the Communities for Work Plus programme, but longer term (depending on Welsh Government guidelines and should no national programme be put forward) it could be looked to repurpose some Rural Development Plan funding to develop a Powys employability programme.
Regulatory Support and Guidance	Powys County Council has developed a website containing a range of advice for a variety of business sectors.

	Officers will continue to provide direct support to businesses in response to inquiries and have proactively been contacting businesses with advice.
Town Centre Recovery	Powys County Council has secured Welsh Government funding to provide temporary measures in our main towns that will assist in facilitating social distancing in those high streets. Over the coming weeks and months engagement will take place with Local Members and Town/Community Councils during the development and implementation of plans.
Shop Local Powys Business App	To assist small businesses to capitalise on the localism demonstrated during COVID-19 a funding application has been submitted to Welsh Government to develop a “Eat, Shop, Drink Local” App. This App/website will provide businesses with the digital infrastructure to sell their produce to an online marketplace. This will support businesses to change their delivery model without the need for expensive development costs.
Government Lobbying	Throughout the economic recovery process, Powys County Council will use our networks to ensure that any future government economic policy is rural-proofed. In addition, given the constraints that our rural geography places on the county, we will lobby for a specific task force to develop a Welsh rural economy strategy and for specific rural business support grants.

Phase 3 – Renewal

Action	Detail
Procurement Strategy	Work will be undertaken to further understand our local supply chains, and contracts where practicable will be packaged to provide opportunities for local businesses in bidding. We will engage with Business Wales to provide support for local businesses and to give them a greater chance of success in bidding for Powys County Council contracts.

	Meet the buyer events will be held and we will ensure that the procurement process is as simple as possible for all suppliers. In addition, the Wellbeing of Future Generation Act will be built into the procurement process.
Economic Development Strategy	Existing Powys County Council economic development strategies will be reviewed to ensure that they are fit for purpose, and determine what new interventions are needed. The pandemic has identified weaknesses in current practices, new ways of working and potential lessons learnt that provide an opportunity to 'build back better' and support a smarter, more robust, and sustainable economy going forward.
Employment Site and Premises	A Mid Wales regional employment sites and premises study is underway. An action plan will be developed following its completion to ensure an adequate supply of high-quality sites and premises to encourage new business (incubator units), expansion and innovation. New sites and premises will be carbon neutral contributing towards a green recovery, whilst supporting our economy and communities.
Food and Drink Action Plan	Working with local producers a food and drink action plan will be developed in order to build stronger local food supply chains. Local food suppliers will be supported to grow and a food and drink skills plan developed. Through liaison with community groups, and supported by the Eat, Shop, Drink Local App a new local food economy will be born.

Phase 4 – Transformation

Action	Detail
Mid Wales Strategic Economic Plan	<p>The Mid Wales Strategic Economic Plan was published in March 2020 and has 8 key areas of focus, growing these sectors will be key to the overall recovery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applied Research and Innovation • Strengthened Tourism Offer • Energy • Skills and Employability • Supporting Enterprise • Transport

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture, Food and Drink • Digital. <p>Although no specific projects have yet been identified, COVID-19 recovery will be at the heart of developing our future economy.</p>
Mid Wales Growth Deal	<p>Much of the transformational phase of our economic recovery will be delivered through the Mid Wales Growth Deal. Although the proposition document was developed before the pandemic, much of the proposal will prepare the ground for recovery. It is proposed that the Mid Wales Growth Deal will take place as three interconnected and mutually dependent programmes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadening our Economy: Developing new opportunities from our assets – focusing on high value and growth supporting opportunities. • Strengthening our Economy: Supporting our existing industries and workforce to become more resilient through capacity building and creating the right conditions for future growth. • Connecting our Economy: Improving digital and connectivity within, across and outside the region to ensure the region is attractive to work, live, and play. <p>The Mid Wales Growth Deal will be positioned a core component within the wider regional economic recovery efforts and will be key to ensure future economic resilience of Powys (and Mid Wales).</p>
Digital Strategy	<p>Utilising the Digital Powys 2019 – 2025 strategy we will work to ensure that Powys is fully connected allowing businesses and individuals to make the most of the digital world. This will not only support businesses in opening up new markets but has the potential through using real time data to increase productivity. Assisting both with the mitigation of COVID-19 and longer-term business growth.</p>
Sustainable Transport Networks	<p>The Mid Wales Joint Local Transport Plan framework will be the delivery mechanism for this, however road and public transport will be considered as well</p>

	<p>as wider behavioural changes and decarbonisation. Development of active travel routes will continue, and a fresh emphasis will be placed a partnership approach to develop integrated sustainable transport networks.</p> <p>Whilst the closure of non-essential shops will have affected many logistics companies, the overall impact on the sector should only be relatively short to medium-term. However, how logistics firms operate in the future may change particularly as shopping habits continue to shift online. This sector will also need to respond to the low-carbon agenda. Move to shifting freight by rail, Powys being the heart of Wales the centre to be able to work with these organisations to try and expand.</p>
Low Carbon Powys	<p>The forthcoming Powys Public Service Board Carbon Positive Strategy and the Mid Wales Energy Strategy (and delivery plan) will be the basis for Powys transforming to being a low carbon county. Although some projects may get taken forward through the Mid Wales Growth Deal, other elements could be taken forward through other means to develop holistic approach to a future green Powys economy.</p>
Town Centre Transformation	<p>Our towns are the heart of Powys, they are our day to day hubs, and prior to the current pandemic were already facing huge difficulties. Town centres will be supported through Powys County Council adopting a town centre first principle. Town centres will be prioritised and through improving street scene and environmental credentials they will remain attractive destinations for tourists, and a hub for residents. Funding will be applied for town centre regeneration projects, green infrastructure/biodiversity, and the town centre loan scheme promoted.</p>

Critical to the delivery of the Powys economic recovery plan is support from UK and Welsh Governments, much will depend on the UK/Welsh Governments determining what future interventions are required in order to support public services and to underpin the economy. Full consideration needs to be given to the full financial impact of the crisis on the Council, the likely level of support for the council, and what capacity both human and physical can the Powys County Council utilise to support economic recovery.

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Date issued: July 2020

Powys County Council – Covid-19 learning and recovery – Observations from online committees and meetings

Background

- 1 This work is undertaken to help discharge the Auditor General's duties under section 17 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004, section 18 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015. Further information about our [work](#) and our [privacy notice](#) is available on our [website](#).
- 2 In Spring 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic had an unprecedented impact on our communities and public services. Councils have a key role to help keep staff and residents safe, adapt their decision-making arrangements, prioritise services and collaborate with partners to try and limit the spread and impact of the virus.
- 3 Powys County Council (the Council) invoked their business critical continuity plan on 18 March 2020 (the Social Services department invoked theirs on 16 March), which enabled the Council to focus on business critical activities. This limited the number and format of committees meeting. With the introduction of [new regulations from the Welsh Government](#) towards the end of April 2020, provision was made for council meetings during the pandemic. From May 2020, the Council began to hold a number of cabinet, scrutiny and other committee meetings online.
- 4 In addition to this document, Audit Wales has produced a blog on "[Local council democracy – coming out of lockdown.](#)" which gives a picture of how scrutiny and other formal meetings are being re-introduced across Wales.

Summary of observations

- 5 For the purposes of obtaining information to inform the Auditor General's work, we have observed the council's online meetings including cabinet and scrutiny since May 2020. The following sets out a summary of practices and information based on the limited examples and activities we have observed to date.

Democratic structures have been re-introduced relatively quickly

- 6 The Council in Powys were able to make use of technology quickly through the use of Microsoft Teams live events and meetings to allow councillors, officers and members of the public to join and/or view public meetings. With reference to the above blog covering the

national picture of council democracy, Powys, in comparison with some other councils acted quickly to reintroduce a number of meetings. In Powys it was the re-introduction of these meetings over a breadth of committees including cabinet and scrutiny which is notable compared to some other councils in Wales, who may have only restarted a more limited number of meetings.

- 7 We have observed that the online meeting technology has sat alongside existing and widely used systems for publication of documents, agendas and minutes on the council's website. This includes accessing agenda items before a meeting and accessing minutes and decisions following meetings. This has meant there is a system in place to provide a transparent record available online to the public about decisions taken by the council and its performance during lockdown.
- 8 The live viewing of meetings has the potential to encourage and help ease of access for public awareness and engagement with council activity. The Council's online meetings show the Council taking steps to involve the wider public in the activities of the council, informing the public of progress on decisions and being accountable to the public. Through Teams' events and meetings, the public have been able to access online meetings live and view recordings. Our observation of this system is that it seems a simple and easy way to access meetings without onerous steps to gain this access.

Formal scrutiny of decisions and services has been re-instated early at the Council

- 9 By mid-July half of council in Wales will have held virtual meetings of scrutiny committees. Powys Council have put in place arrangements for formal scrutiny sessions including finance; health and care; learning and skills; and economy, residents, communities and governance. Furthermore, the Council are at a point where they have had several meetings of these committees since May 2020.
- 10 The scrutiny arrangements the Council has put in place seem to give members the opportunity to gather information and challenge officers and cabinet members around business critical activities as well as some information around wider service activity and recovery work. This also provides an opportunity for the public to observe decision-making, including scrutiny of decisions.
- 11 During this period, we observed an example of arrangements in place for a scrutiny chair to feedback a scrutiny committees' views to cabinet on a key decision. The scrutiny chair had an opportunity to provide a response to proposed plans, provide recommendations and raise questions. The online attendance and input from a chair of scrutiny to a cabinet meeting suggests independent challenge on decision making from scrutiny during the lockdown period. The example seems to show the relationship between cabinet and scrutiny in a transparent way that indicates clear roles for scrutiny committees in helping to shape decision making.

There are opportunities to maintain the momentum and learn from ‘digital democracy’

- 12 Looking towards the future, there might be opportunities to learn from the experiences of holding meetings online and to consider this learning to shape future practices. The Council has shown that virtual meetings can work well, and there might be financial, time and environmental benefits to providing online meeting facilities in the future. All of which might have the potential to improve value for money.
- 13 Many councillors have shown their ability to embrace the use of technology for online meetings. There may be further opportunities to gain insights from members on any member development and training that may help them to participate more effectively in online meetings.
- 14 There are some challenges in holding formal meetings exclusively online, at this stage there may be opportunities to gain insights about the effectiveness of these arrangements. Further engagement with the public to gather views about their experiences of observing meetings during this period could also help to provide timely feedback on the effectiveness of these arrangements from their perspective.

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 14 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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