

# Report of the Chief Executive to the meeting of Executive to be held on 9 November 2020

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**Subject: COVID-19: Response, Resilience, Recovery**

## **Summary statement:**

COVID-19 has had a significant and disproportionate impact on Bradford District. Council resources have been key to managing the response and planning for recovery but are insufficient to meet the direct financial impacts. This report examines impact and outlook in key areas of activity. Persistent uncertainty around infection rates, restrictions and the socio-economic effect hinder effective planning and resourcing. Brexit and the annual winter flu will place a further burden on resources and another emergency event would stretch them beyond breaking point. Additional Government support is needed to manage complex scenarios and demands, avoid system failure, protect the NHS, keep services running and plan for recovery. Looking further ahead, the Council needs certainty in funding arrangements and support to invest in education, skills and infrastructure in order to achieve public service reform with improved outcomes and a more inclusive and sustainable District as we recovery from COVID-19. These requirements form the basis of a series of recommendations to Government.

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## **Portfolio:**

**Leader of the Council and Corporate**

## **Overview & Scrutiny Area:**

**Corporate**

## 1. BACKGROUND

### 1.1 Responding to COVID-19

Since March 2020, in the face of unprecedented challenges, Bradford Council has worked alongside its partners to manage complex and resource intensive activity on three key fronts:

- **Managing the immediate impact of the COVID-19 crisis** for example, working to prevent and control the spread of the virus, get help and care to vulnerable people, support communities and businesses and maintain essential core services.
- **Maintaining service delivery** including managing increasing, changing and complex demands such as those in children's, social care and Domestic Abuse, getting the economy and schools up and running as safely as possible, bringing sport and leisure facilities back into operation and ensuring democratically accountable decision taking.
- **Planning for and supporting recovery**, taking action on skills, maintaining and re-modelling support for business, progressing plans for regeneration and infrastructure.

1.2 Council services, staff and resources have played a critical role in shaping and implementing the local response amidst a backdrop of huge uncertainty, changing restrictions, including a period where different restrictions applied in different parts of the District, and widespread confusion about the rules. Council staff have been magnificent; many people have worked flat out and over and above the call of duty often deploying innovative responses to the challenges presented by the crisis.

The Council works as part of a wider system and network of services and organisations. Partnership working has been key to the response and we have seen outstanding work and commitment from people across all sectors including armies of volunteers. Bradford district has been home to pioneering work for example, in the work of Born in Bradford tracking the impact on local families, the partnership led "Behind the Mask" campaign, the University's participation in the first mass vaccine trials and the work on COVID-19 treatments undertaken at Bradford Teaching Hospitals Foundation Trust that has been recognised in the award of an MBE to consultant Tom Lawton.

The Government's Chief Medical Officer, Chris Whitty, has described Bradford's collective leadership and work on the ground as "superb". There can however, be no room for complacency. High levels of infections persist and capacity across local systems and communities remains under enormous pressure.

1.3 The District's size – over half a million people; its youth – the UK's youngest population and its diversity – over 153 languages spoken, more than a third of people from ethnic minorities and very different geographic communities, are among its principal assets. However, these features alongside existing high levels of inequality, also mean that responding to the pandemic presents complex challenges of a scale, range and intensity that is matched by few other places.

1.4 COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on Bradford District, hitting the poorest people, those from ethnic minorities, the vulnerable, people living alone and people living in large households the hardest. However, no community has been spared and we have seen significant numbers of infections and tragic deaths in all corners of the District. Demand for services is increasing and placing pressure on stretched resources.

- 1.5 The financial impact of COVID-19 on the Council has been significant leading to additional costs, increasing demand for services, loss of income from fees and charges and a negative effect on Council tax and business rates collection. The Council has also deployed resources from its reserves to make critical investments in areas such as skills, domestic violence, support for the care sector, additional tuition for children missing school, school meals over summer, home to school transport, business support and economic development and additional wardens and communications to help secure maximum compliance with restrictions.
- 1.6 The Council continues to face the task of managing multiple and complex challenges and risks as we enter the winter period against a backdrop of ongoing pandemic, increasing demand for and pressure on local services, economic uncertainty and diminishing resources. This includes the pressures that we face every winter including managing the risk and impact of flooding and the overall pressures on the NHS that occurred before the pandemic.
- 1.7 Alongside this, we will be preparing the district's communities and businesses for EU Exit on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021 and for the adoption of a new mayoral West Yorkshire Combined Authority with an elected mayor in May 2021.
- 1.8 A lot has been learned about what works best and what works less well as we continue to tackle the pandemic. This learning helps to inform a series of recommendations to Government which also include calls for certainty and sufficiency in Council funding now and into the future.

## **Impact and Outlook**

### **2 Minimising and controlling the spread of infection.**

- 2.1 Bradford District has been hit disproportionately by the COVID-19 pandemic having displayed some of the highest and most persistent infection rates in the country and seen 550 tragic deaths to date.
- 2.2 The District is home to significant levels of inequality. Over 266,000 people live in its most deprived areas and more than a third of children live in poverty; pre-pandemic the gap in life expectancy between the poorest and wealthiest areas was 9.1 years for a man and 8.0 for a woman; over 67,000 people work in the lowest skilled occupations, fuel poverty affects nearly 28,00 households.

COVID-19 has amplified these inequalities and fallen disproportionately on certain groups. The places with the highest levels of infection are characterised by factors including the greatest levels of deprivation, high proportions of BAME residents, large and/or overcrowded households and large numbers of vulnerable people with pre-existing conditions. People in low income occupations are most likely to suffer hardship if they need to self-isolate which brings greater risk of non-compliance and spread of infection. The exacerbation of existing inequality is fuelling additional demand for and pressure on public services and increasing the challenges associated with keeping people safe and reducing the spread of the virus.

- 2.3 Concerns about high infection rates led the Government to decide to place Bradford among the first of the Local Authorities to have local restrictions imposed in relation to household interactions and the re-opening of certain businesses. Those restrictions were subsequently relaxed in some parts of the District which had low infection rates only to be re-imposed as infection rates then rose once more. The differential restrictions in different

places introduced further complexity to a situation in which a degree of confusion over the rules was already evident and presented significant challenges in effective communication and messaging and securing compliance.

2.4 The Government has introduced a tiered approach to managing the spread of infection with different parts of the country placed at “Medium”, “High” or “Very High” according to their levels of infection. At the time of writing Bradford is in tier 2 – “High”. Some regions have become subject to “Very High” tier 3 restrictions and Bradford, along with other West Yorkshire authorities are keeping a close and forensic eye on infection levels and the potential for government to seek discussions with West Yorkshire on escalation to tier 3. Tier 3 status would bring additional restrictions over and above those currently in place in the District and have further implications for our communities, economy and local resources.

2.5 Securing compliance with differing restrictions has presented a number of challenges. For example, nationally the percentage of people asked to self-isolate who comply is low and not expected to be different locally, particularly where people are working on low incomes and the potential impact of loss of income is high.

Bradford is the UK’s youngest city and the natural inclination of young people to gather and share time together alongside a degree of fearlessness among younger age groups, the fact that many live in large, intergenerational households and the return to schools and colleges presents some unique challenges. Bradford District has developed some outstanding responses including working with young people through a network of COVID-19 youth ambassadors to help bust myths and secure increased awareness and compliance.

Feedback from communities indicates that people find the restrictions to household confusing and unfair. People do not understand why they cannot visit a relative in their garden but they can go to the pub. This is undermining their adherence to the restrictions and therefore reducing the impact on infection rates.

Outside of the home, there has been evidence of people failing to comply in large retail outlets and shops generally where the use of face masks is not always being consistently applied. Pubs and restaurants have however generally shown good awareness with evidence from inspections that people are behaving responsibly which runs counter to the national focus on hospitality.

Similarly, restrictions on care home and hospital visiting are widely perceived to be unfair and harsh particularly given that most people entering nursing or residential care are reaching the end of their lives and quality of life including interaction with family members is at a premium. A more ethical and humane approach would be to permit visiting for a nominated family member supported by routine whole care home testing.

Growing cynicism about the impact of the virus and rising “restriction” fatigue is also impacting on compliance. Mixed and confused messaging from Government makes it difficult for people to understand what to do while the speed at which national decisions are made and legislation is introduced is leading to difficulties in understanding legislation and developing the appropriate systems to respond.

2.6 Moving into winter, it is more important than ever that COVID-19 is contained. Restoring public confidence and creating credible leadership is critical. Evidence from our work so far, indicates that local restrictions must be meaningful, evidence based and should support local action. They are therefore far more likely to be observed. Likewise, our experience

shared with other West Yorkshire authorities is that focused work, engaging with local communities is effective in containing and reducing community transmission.

2.7 In order to sustain an effective response to the on-going challenges presented by the pandemic we need to be able to:

- **Deliver effective local test and trace services** that are properly resourced and embedded. Local contact tracing supported by timely testing and transfer of data about cases not contacted by NHS T&T in 24 hours.
- **Get more testing data** from Public Health England so that we can better inform the local response.
- **Increase resources within the Local Contact Tracing Team** to increase the volume of calls that can be taken and to increase the capacity for home visits to follow up where contact can't be made over the phone. Home visits are key to improving our success rates.
- **Support the sustainability** and future viability of our local care market by addressing under occupancy.
- **Increase community engagement and support** at a highly localised level and extend current reach into communities with greater focus on those where the virus is rising as well as where infection rates are already high. This work supports education, awareness and reinforcing key local and national messages. This is something we initiated well ahead of the national "marshal" proposals and involves a number of key front line teams delivering a range of activity and support including:
  - Shielding support
  - Protecting vulnerable groups and communities
  - There is a significant enhanced requirement for enforcement with business through environmental health activity and the associated legal processes to serve notices on non-compliant business
  - Early help and prevention
  - Local lockdown advice support and guidance
  - Sign posting for support
  - Deliver targeted communications
  - Financial support for people on low incomes to self-isolate
- **Strengthen the way we work in partnership** and build more sophisticated systems for recording where work has taken place.
- **Sustain dedicated communications.** Bradford has delivered some outstanding and innovative communications work since the pandemic began including promoting a Household Plan to every household in the District, the use of the iVan to promote key messages in languages other than English and the "Behind the Mask" campaign, telling true stories about the impact of the virus on individuals. Additional resource has been invested to support the scale and range of communications that has been necessary and this will need to be sustained in order maintain and increase awareness of key messages and secure maximum compliance with restrictions.

These activities are where the Council will focus its work to limit the spread of infection over Winter. They are however, resource intensive. In responding to the pandemic to date, the Council moved quickly to establish new services and re-focus existing services to respond to the needs of the district and its residents and businesses. This response however, depended on the redeployment of resources that have now returned to their core business

and are no longer available to directly support the response.

The response was also dependent on workforce resilience, endurance and capacity to ensure a 24/7 presence. That capacity simply cannot be maintained on an on-going basis without additional investment.

### **3 Maintaining service delivery including managing escalating and complex demands.**

3.1 The first wave of COVID-19 required significant and rapid changes to operational delivery including standing down some services, re-deploying staff and innovating to ensure that other essential services were able to continue. As the District has emerged from lockdown we are bringing services back albeit often using different models of delivery.

Over the winter months the Council will seek to bring as many services back into operation as fully as resources and restrictions will allow. We will however ensure that the primary focus of activity and resource is on the following areas of activity:

- securing the fundamental services on which our communities rely such as refuse collection, recycling and bereavement services;
- managing increasing, changing and complex demands such as those in children's, social care and Domestic Abuse,
- getting the economy and schools up and running as safely as possible;
- bringing sport and leisure facilities back into operation;
- ensuring democratically accountable decision taking.

3.2 Delivery of the full array of Council services normally available to residents and businesses, has been fundamentally changed by COVID-19. As well as requiring the development of new and innovative services and responses, the pandemic is placing services under pressure. Services under particular strain include those providing care and support to vulnerable and at risk residents and those supporting the safe return to schools who are dealing with increasing numbers of notifications of infections.

3.3 Social care services were already under pressure before the pandemic. Since 2011, the Council has invested £42m in adult social care to meet demographic growth. The 2020/21 budget added further resources for this purpose. In addition to these investments a £6.1m cash injection was made in 2019/20 to address structural overspends.

The Council's investments helped Bradford to secure a place among the best performers nationally in tackling bed blocking helping to alleviate pressure on the NHS. The current position is nevertheless, unsustainable. Contacts to Adult Social Care are now above the pre-COVID-19 baseline and continue to increase.

3.4 Adult Social Care will not however, be able to meet its full financial savings targets in 2020/21 or 2021/22 because care providers have been solely focussed on people's safety and infection control during the pandemic rather than care reviews and negotiating on fee levels. Similarly, care reviews and home visits have been smaller in number – limited to essential visits only. New care plans with community alternatives have therefore not been possible due to this and the fact that many community groups have not been meeting as usual.

- 3.5 Support for the care sector, such as developing and maintaining a care sector resilience plan; diverting staffing and financial resource to the sector and ensuring a viable care market is key to Winter resilience. However, COVID-19 has placed local care providers and the care market under pressure in terms of managing infection control and under-occupancy and through increased costs for staff, PPE and cleaning and insurance. Increased community transmission of Covid-19 is beginning to show within care services again, with outbreaks in care homes in particular beginning to increase. While at the moment cases are mainly in the workforce, asymptomatic identified through proactive testing there are some early indications that transmission with care homes could be happening in some cases.
- 3.6 The Council has invested resources to assist the care sector over and above ring-fenced funding provided by Government. A proposal to allocate a further £3.1m additional Council support to the sector has been made for consideration by Executive as part of the Council's Quarter 2 Finance Report. This support however, cannot be sustained for a prolonged period. The viability of local providers and the wider market is in jeopardy. Currently 26 of our care homes are below 70% occupancy and we are seeing some smaller homes closing. Market failure will lead to intolerable pressures on the NHS as we approach Winter. Other risks include higher infection rates among staff and the potential inability to source care at an affordable rate
- 3.7 The power to raise money locally through a social care precept can only go so far in addressing the funding gap in adult social care and the on-going risks to the sector, especially given Bradford's relatively low tax base. Budgets continue to come under pressure from increasing demand.
- 3.8 The Council initiated a full response to people who were notified they were on the shielded list by the NHS in the early days of the pandemic. At this time, no-one in Bradford District is now being asked to shield. New guidance was issued by the Government on 13 October with advice for those who are clinically extremely vulnerable but stopped short of formally asking them to shield. However, the council has a shielding plan which has been developed in line with national requirements and which is ready to be initiated should Bradford District residents be asked to do so.
- 3.9 Children's social care services were experiencing increasing demand pressures prior to COVID-19. The numbers of Children Looked After (CLA) increased by 36% between December 2011 and December 2019, a period in which Council budgets have been reducing. Over the two years between December 2017 and 2019 the numbers of children on Child Protection Plans increased by over 80%. The Council has invested significant resources to meet and reduce demand for children's services amounting to amounting to over £23m of base budget increases, and £6.5m of time limited support in the last two financial years. The Medium Term Financial Forecast is also estimating that further significant amounts will be required next year and beyond.
- 3.10 As a consequence of COVID-19 however, the scale and complexity of demand is increasing. The number of children on child protection plans rose from 953 in March 2020 to 1,038 in August 2020 and stood at 1,016 in early October, with numbers starting to rise once more. The 1<sup>st</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> September 2020 saw 1,917 contacts to the children's social care front door compared 1,451 in the same period in 2019. The number of children in care has reached a record high of 1373 at the start of October compared to 1258 in March. The

number of children ceasing care continues to decrease due to lack of court availability.

- 3.11 Council services have worked flat out to support schools to open and stay open safely however we have inevitably seen outbreaks and individual infections within schools. Should we see significant numbers of whole school closures this would represent an increased safeguarding risk to vulnerable children.

Other key factors impacting on service capacity and resilience include:

- Our specialist domestic abuse service – Survive and Thrive has experienced up to 76% more referrals during COVID-19 than pre-COVID-19.
  - Not going to school through the need to self-isolate represents a potential additional risk to vulnerable children.
  - The impact on children who are living in households with people who are shielding.
  - The need to provide public health and COVID-19 support and advice to schools and educational institutions.
  - Additional provision of home to school transport.
  - Increasing public health issues as resource is prioritised to COVID-19 related activity.
  - Staff availability as people fall ill, self-isolate or take accumulated leave.
  - Liaison and support activity with VCS, Care Association and other bodies.
  - Staff numbers, capacity and resilience.
  - The increasing return to “business as usual” of government departments and NGO’s and their requirements of local authorities for example in responding to monitoring and inspection regimes.
- 3.12 The Council provides democratically accountable leadership to the District and ensuring open and transparent decision taking and scrutiny of those decisions is fundamental to Council activity. The restrictions associated with COVID-19 have prevented Elected Members meeting formally in person however Executive meetings are now held remotely according to the usual cycle of Council business and work is ongoing to expand the numbers of committees able to meet online and increase the numbers of key meetings such as meetings of full council. Strategic decisions on policy and resources will continue to be taken formally by elected members with portfolio holders consulted on and engaged in key operational decisions.

## 4 Planning for and supporting recovery

- 4.1 The economic and social consequences of the COVID pandemic on the District have been significant. The impact of COVID has disproportionately affected some businesses and individuals. Alongside the work we are doing to tackle the day to day impact of the pandemic, we also need to work to support the recovery from the pandemic.

### 4.2 Supporting the Economic Recovery

Whilst the full implications of the ongoing pandemic are still unknown, it is clear that the impact on the district and our economy has been severe.

- **There has been a significant fall in the levels of business activity** with associated job losses, business failures and sector shifts.
- **Unemployment has risen sharply** with thousands of workers across the district looking for jobs. between March and September, nearly 14,500 additional people in the district became unemployed (an increase of 84% compared to the level in March). Increases in unemployment have disproportionately affected younger people in the district with an

- **Youth unemployment has nearly doubled since the start of the pandemic** with an increase of 3,455 between March and September and is the highest rate in the UK; the pattern of previous recessions shows that unemployment has a greater negative impact for young people, particularly in BAME communities.
- **A third of the district workforce were furloughed** at the height of the lockdown. Particularly in Leisure and Culture (in July 45% of all workers furloughed) and hospitality (in July 43% of all workers furloughed). Based on national figures, where we have seen furloughed workers reduce by around 50%, we estimate that currently around 15% of the workforce are still furloughed with retail, hospitality, manufacturing and leisure most impacted.
- Whilst the majority of the District's businesses are now operating, around half are operating below normal levels if Bradford is following national trends.
- **A huge decline in city and town centre footfall (around a 60% fall in footfall in both Bradford city centre and Keighley town centre compared to usual levels)**. It is not clear when footfall will fully recover and what the lasting impacts will be. Although most of our businesses are now trading, almost half are operating at reduced levels and will need support to weather the impact of COVID and invest and transform to take advantage of future opportunities.
- Local restrictions have put hospitality, retail and leisure business under increased pressure. Recent surveys of businesses in the District's city and town centres show that there are concerns about future viability if Tier Two restrictions stay in place. 77% of pubs and restaurants in Keighley and Ilkley are not confident about their future viability if these local restrictions continue. There have also been reductions in turnover and there are fears for further job losses in this sector in Bradford City centre. 96% of businesses in Keighley town centre and 83% of businesses in Ilkley are less confident about their future under Tier Three restrictions.

Alongside the challenges of COVID-19, we also need to prepare our local economy for existing the European Union. Whilst this may present opportunities, there will also be some challenges particularly for sectors such as logistics and our 740 EU owned enterprises. These are businesses where the final details of a trade deal and regulations will have a huge impact with potential consequences on overall employment in the district.

We have been working hard to support our business community through the pandemic and to tackle the uncertainties of the future. We have: supported 11,055 different businesses across the district to get over £126 million in support through the Small Business Grant and retail, hospitality and leisure grant. We have helped over 77 retail and hospitality high street locations in the District transform to continue trading whilst adhering to social distancing. We have also made an initial investment of £696k to provide an increased number of skilled and sustained employment opportunities

Modelling commissioned by the West Yorkshire Economic Recovery Board suggests that even in the event of a relatively strong recovery, the district economy is expected to contract by up to 10% in 2020. If we see a slower uneven recovery, it could shrink by almost 30% by the end of 2021. This is an unprecedented contraction in the scale of our local economy which will have an impact for years to come.

We will need to prepare our residents and businesses to take advantage of the job opportunities of the future. We know we have potential in sectors such as:

- **The Green Economy** - The district is already home to around 10,000 environmental sector jobs and some exemplar businesses including Texfelt, a manufacturer using recycled fibres and plastics, Yorkshire Water and the pioneering Ecology Building Society. Many other businesses in the district are using pioneering techniques to reduce their overall

environmental footprint and improve their efficiency. 'Green jobs' is a big potential growth area for the district. Research undertaken by Leeds City Region suggests that clean growth could add £11bn to the city region economy and create 100,000 extra skilled jobs for local people in a range of sectors, from energy and utilities to innovative design to food to construction. We need further investment from central government to assist the recovery from the COVID pandemic includes a

- **Digital industries** are also central to our future economic success. Our thriving digital sector already includes 700 businesses employing 4,500 people in companies such as Arris, ECSC and Radio Design.
- **Our culture and creative sector** will also be increasingly important, as we look to become the City of Culture 2025 and build on our existing strong offer. We have already launched our bid for City of Culture 2025 and success would see the District host a year-long, high quality cultural programme bringing significant economic and cultural benefits and a great boost to our creative and cultural industries. Bradford District already has 385 businesses in the Cultural sector employing around 4,500 people.

To help us develop the District's recovery, a new Economic Recovery Partnership has been created. This is chaired by Zahir Irani, Pro Vice Chancellor of the University of Bradford and includes representatives from the full range of sectors and skills providers. This work will develop a full plan of Bradford's recovery by the end of the year around four areas:

1. **Skilled employees and employment in new and growing sectors:** Ensuring opportunity for all through a unified employment and skills offer, meeting employer needs.
2. **A Green Economy:** Enable the transition to a sustainable, resilient and connected economy for a zero-carbon future through infrastructure investment and behaviour change.
3. **Business Start-ups & Entrepreneurship:** Support the growth of innovative and high performing businesses, creating good jobs and building on our business and sector strengths.
4. **Culture & Place:** Use our diverse cultural assets and distinctive places to drive growth by attracting visitors, businesses and skilled workers.

We will report on this later in the year.

### 4.3 Supporting the Social Recovery

The COVID pandemic has had severe impacts on our local population and has exacerbated some of the equalities that previously existed.

Everyone in the district has been affected by the COVID pandemic and the Born in Bradford Survey of 9,000 households has revealed evidence of a rise in mental health issues, financial concerns and stability.

Whilst everyone in the district has been affected, the social and economic impact of the pandemic will have potentially a more profound effect on people with certain characteristics. This includes people with an ethnic minority background, women, single parents, those with a disability or long term condition, younger people and people living in poverty (particularly children). In most of these groups, Bradford District has a proportionately large population and will be affected more by these impacts.

Some of this, but not all of the issues, will be resolved by providing an inclusive economic recovery, supported with support for training and retraining as outlined above. We also need to tackle some of the social issues that

- Ensure we can support children (particularly those from lower income backgrounds) to catch up on the education they have missed out on through lock down to ensure that they have an equal opportunity to achieve their full potential.
- Help address the overall impact of poverty on the district.
- Ensuring that we work with the local NHS, the VCS and other partners to address the rise in mental health problems before they get out of control.
- Support our communities and young people and bring them together.

Through the refresh of the council plan, the children's plan, the anti-poverty group the Council is addressing some of these concerns. But given the long term social issues could lead to longer term issues (and financial pressures), we would welcome the Government to work alongside us to address these issues early on as part of its wider levelling up agenda.

## **5 Financial Pressures**

- 5.1 The financial impact of COVID-19 on the Council has been significant leading to additional costs, increasing demand for services, loss of income from fees and charges and a negative effect on Council tax and business rates collection.
- 5.2 Most additional activity has been supported through government funding however Council expenditure on COVID 19 related work will not all be recoverable and is currently being tracked. As well as incurring additional expenditure the Council has lost income through fees and charges.
- 5.3 The Council is forecasting an overspend related to COVID-19 of around £7m in 2020-21, however the escalating pressures on social care services mean that an overspend of £11.8m is forecast overall.
- 5.4 Deficits on the collection of Council Tax and business rates as a result of the pandemic are also expected to be in the region of c£8m in 2020-21, and this will impact on Council budgets over the next three years.
- 5.5 The pressures arising from COVID-19 compound an already challenging financial position. Since 2011, as a result of increasing demand and costs alongside national spending cuts, Bradford Council has had to find £296m in savings. By 2023 this will rise to £309m. This is in addition to a net increase in Council tax of 27% over the last ten years including use of the social care precept. While the Council has managed its resources prudently and responsibly over recent years its Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) published earlier this year nevertheless forecast a budget gap of £48m for 2021-22 as a result of the combined factors set out here. Revisions to the MTFS undertaken since its publication suggest that the outstanding budget gap is £34m.
- 5.6 As the Council looks to bridge that gap it does so under unparalleled levels of uncertainty. There is a high likelihood that income will continue to be lost beyond the end of March 2021 in areas such as theatres, sports facilities, car parking etc. however the government's local authority income scheme is due to end this year with no certainty about its renewal. The Council is likely to continue to face additional expenditure for example, in supporting the care market and unless the Government's Emergency Grants funding continues then these will create additional and unsustainable budget pressures. The Council is also likely to collect lower levels of Council tax and business rates as a result of impending economic recession.
- 5.7 In addition to COVID-19 a number of other factors are unresolved including the Fair Funding Review, Business Rates Baseline reset, move to 75% Business Rates retention, Social Care

Green Paper and the impact of Brexit.

- 5.8 Bradford is partnering with government on key initiatives including designation as an Opportunity Area and as an Integration Area. These programmes are delivering innovative and ground breaking work to improve social mobility and integration from which the whole country can learn yet they have a limited time scale with no certainty as to their continuation. The impact of COVID-19 has heightened existing inequalities, seen new ones emerge and threatens to undermine community cohesion. It is critical then that the work of the Opportunity and Integration areas is sustained.
- 5.9 We recognise that the Government faces fiscal challenges that are unprecedented in peacetime and that financial support has thus far been forthcoming. It is critical that we achieve a much greater degree of certainty about plans for funding for local government and that those plans are fair, ensure sufficient resources to meet the District's needs and make an ongoing commitment to ensuring that the additional costs and loss of income associated with COVID-19 are not shouldered by local authorities. Any additional costs incurred as a result of "High" or "Very High" status must be met by central Government. Without this certainty and commitment, we are planning in the dark and face a potential collapse in financial resilience that will see a retrenchment to the provision of statutory services only with significant consequences for public services such as the NHS, the care sector, schools and education, the criminal justice system and for the prospects for a robust economic recovery.

## **6 WINTER RESILIENCE**

- 6.1 The challenges and priorities set out in sections 2 to 5 of this report set the framework for the Council's Winter planning.
- 6.2 Planning is being undertaken amidst significant levels of uncertainty and with financial resources and organisational capacity stretched. As staff are increasingly deployed back into their usual roles there are fewer to fall back on to support the efforts to minimise and prevent the spread of infections.

Many employees have worked relentlessly since the onset of the pandemic and at a pace that cannot reasonably be expected to be sustained. There is a genuine risk of staff fatigue and burn out impacting on capacity while significant backlogs of leave have accrued among some teams which will need to be managed.

- 6.3 Key issues affecting the Council's service planning include:

- Health and safety of employees
- Terms and conditions
- Risk assessments
- Staff working from home
- Changing government advice on working practices
- Pressure on central services such as Human Resources.
- Staff fatigue
- Staff illness
- Staff shielding or isolating.
- Reliance on key individuals exposing single points of failure.

- 6.4 The Council is works in partnership with other organisations as part of a complex wider system. Many of those partner organisations are also facing challenges.

The Clinical Commissioning Group are facing pressure on capacity and resilience, as are

local hospitals and blue light services.

The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) has played a critical role working alongside the Council in responding to COVID-19. The sector is also a key partner in the delivery of a wide range of “business as usual” services commissioned by the Council that contribute to the health and well-being of individuals and communities in all parts of the District. The VCS is reporting evidence of sector wide stress on constituent organisations including concerns about the sustainability of larger organisations, the inability to plan effectively, constraints on service provision, capacity to meet demand and pressures on staff. Smaller organisations face potential closure, the loss of volunteers and the impact of reduced fundraising activity. The Council has taken action to support the sector and continues to work with it to support its resilience.

6.5 The Winter months could potentially bring further events that would impact on the capacity and resilience of the Council and its partners including:

- Bradford District being categorised as or moved to a High Level area
- Circuit Breaker or second lockdown will pose logistical challenges. to support as we have now remobilised BAU and most staff are now back working in their substantive roles.
- COVID-19 outbreaks in key service areas.
- Pressures from the annual winter flu outbreak and securing sufficient supplies of flu vaccine.
- Severe cold weather
- Widespread flooding
- Impact of any new or renewed restrictions on community cohesion

6.6 All Council services have been required to review their business continuity and contingency plans for the months ahead in order to:

- Identify existing pressure points and any plans currently in place to address these
- Consider the learning gained over the last 6 months including the identification of how this might inform winter planning, and identify priorities for service delivery and additional resource requirements in the face of a further emergency.

The Council is a formal partner in the health and care partnership and participates in system winter planning (to include Covid-19 and Brexit implications this year) to ensure there is sufficient care capacity to meet heightened levels of need over winter.

The Council also continues to work with partners to build on the foundations laid earlier this year that prioritise early help and intervention, approaches based on inter-organisational work at a local level and galvanising voluntary and community assets and activity.

6.7 The reality however, is that in the event of a further emergency which would require support such as enhanced community engagement and reassurance, social care or public health interventions capacity would be stretched to and potentially beyond its ability to cope. With staff and resources re-deployed to deal with the immediate impact, this would compromise our ability to prevent the spread of infection, deliver vital services and keep our economy in business.

6.8 Bradford and Councils up and down the country need certainty and confidence that Government financial support will continue to be available throughout the winter and beyond, that a constructive and open dialogue is maintained between the Council and Ministers and that outstanding issues around social care and local government funding will be resolved as a matter of urgency.

Without further Government support the ability of Bradford to minimise infections and protect the NHS through Winter while keeping people safe, schools open and building for recovery will be compromised. Should we face a further emergency then our capacity will be stretched to such an extent that we can potentially see widespread system failures.

## **7 Working to sustain resilience through Winter and beyond: recommendations to Government**

7.1 While Government funding in the face of the pandemic to date has been welcome, Government must now continue to work with us to sustain the District's superb response to the COVID-19 pandemic, maintain resilience throughout the Winter, place Council finances and services on a sustainable long-term footing and deliver an inclusive recovery that contributes to a genuine levelling up of the national economy.

7.2 To achieve these goals we call for further Government financial and policy support in order to deliver a number of short and long-term objectives founded on some fundamental principles.

The Council has developed a set of recommendations that reflect learning from our experience of the pandemic and local insight alongside national, regional and District level issues and concerns. The Council calls on Government to work with us and adopt the following recommendations in full.

### **Responding to COVID-19 & Winter Resilience**

#### **Recommendation 1.**

Local leaders must be involved in any decision about the approach to tackling the virus including any restrictions that directly affect the District.

#### **Recommendation 2.**

Local places need to be resourced to lead the health response.

#### **Recommendation 3.**

Provide sufficient support for individuals self-isolating.

#### **Recommendation 4**

For both High and Very High level areas, provide sufficient economic support to impacted businesses (both those required to close and those severely affected)

#### **Recommendation 5**

Improve monitoring and be transparent in sharing evidence, including on what leads to decisions about what levels of restrictions apply to areas.

#### **Recommendation 6**

Carry out more detailed and well-communicated forward planning.

#### **Recommendation 7**

Work with local authorities to ensure a package of additional financial support for local areas designated as High or Very High in order to tackle the virus, support communities and to protect the NHS, jobs and the economy. This must as a minimum include extra resources for local authorities to deliver the following activity:

- Deliver more effective local test and trace and infection control for High and Very High Levels including additional local testing capacity and testing routes, deep community communications, engagement and support in partnership with our voluntary and community sector; assisting businesses and the most vulnerable; continuing work to keep schools and school travel safe.
- Strengthen key services to help deal with the pandemic – Public Health, Environmental Health, Infection Prevention and Control and Communications.
- Targeted multi-agency enforcement activity
- Additional support around food parcels and other services for those self-isolating.
- Data analyst capacity to help targeting of community protection plans
- Support for low paid people to self-isolate.

#### **Recommendation 8**

Permit care home and hospital visiting for a nominated family member supported by routine whole care home testing. This will deliver a more ethical and humane approach to visits.

### **Maintaining service delivery including meeting escalating demand.**

#### **Recommendation 9**

Recognise the financial pressures and challenges we face in maintaining service delivery and provide additional resource in this financial year to:

- Ensure that our critical front line services are stepped up to meet on-going and increased demand, which remains volatile, especially in relation to Children In Need, Child Protection and Looked After Children.
- Secure care home resilience.
- Support the resilience of our Voluntary and Community Sector which is a key delivery partner.

#### **Recommendation 10**

Work with us to invest in and support locality based approaches to early help and prevention which allow for flexibility in the deployment of public funding across and between agencies. This should include support for “Act Early North” which will implement and evaluate early life interventions to prevent disease and reduce inequalities. This will help us to ensure that we are able to capture system wide co-production supporting communities to help themselves and drive down demand on statutory services.

#### **Recommendation 11**

Afford all Local Authorities the flexibility to manage budget deficits potentially through capitalisation of time limited COVID-91 related expenditure. This will help to avoid the need for cuts to vital public services.

#### **Recommendation 12**

Ensure certainty in Council funding and a sustainable long-term financial settlement that properly recognises the District’s needs, demand pressures and the limits of its local tax base.

#### **Recommendation 13**

Provide adequate financial support to keep pace with the demands of annual demographic growth and inflation in adults and children’s social care.

**Recommendation 14**

Bring forward the plan to deliver a sustainable solution to adult social care as a matter of urgency and ensure that social care achieves parity with health services and is fairly funded so that it can relieve pressure on the NHS and other public services.

**Recommendation 15**

Sustain investment in Bradford's Opportunity Area and Integration Area.

**Planning for Recovery****Recommendation 16**

For High level areas enhance the current Government grants scheme to also support businesses that are trading at lower levels or forced to close: Grants of £3k-£5k for every 3-week period within restrictions where loss of income of more than 25% is evidenced. Businesses in scope should include Retail, Leisure & Hospitality and relevant supply chain.

**Recommendation 17**

Adapt and deepen the Job Retention Scheme to protect jobs to the same level as the original lockdown and making sure affected self-employed also have support whilst restrictions are in place.

**Recommendation 18**

Enhance the COVID-19 Recovery Grants scheme to support adaptation to new rules to support businesses for reopening and adapting.

**Recommendation 19**

Support our Economic Recovery Plans at both West Yorkshire and District levels and help businesses and the newly unemployed as furlough and business support schemes end;

**Recommendation 20**

Work with us to invest in innovative approaches to skills and levelling up the national economy such as Bradford's SkillsHouse using local knowledge and agency as the way to develop and implement the most productive and cost effective outcomes.

**Recommendation 21**

Explore the potential to pilot a national approach to youth employment and skills in Bradford District.

**Recommendation 22**

Work with us to identify and secure the resources to deliver a five year plan for educational attainment and in so doing secure a sea change in outcomes for our young people and reap dividends for the local and national economy.

**Recommendation 23**

Invest in and secure the support to deliver critical infrastructure and growth projects in Northern Powerhouse Rail and the Bradford South Gateway.

**Recommendation 24**

Sustain investments in the economic and community infrastructure of our towns.

**Recommendation 25**

Meet previous commitments to invest in green jobs and economy and to prioritise the environment, ensuring that local government has the powers and resources it needs and is

fully funded for any new responsibilities.

### **Recommendation 26**

Consider the relocation of Government Departments and employees to Bradford District. This would provide a much need stimulus to local economic growth whilst supporting the Government's objective to have a civil service workforce that is more representative of the nation's demographics.

- 7.3 Bradford Council wants to work together with Government to improve and reform public services and achieve better outcomes, prioritise skills and education and level up the national economy.

With its youth, location at the heart of the North and extensive links to international markets Bradford is ideally positioned to deliver growth, innovation and productivity for generations to come not just here in our District, but across the North. We are already investing in a series of transformational infrastructure and regeneration projects and are compiling a compelling bid for City of Culture 2025.

We have a diverse District with many distinct identities and significant development potential. The Towns fund is investing in Keighley and Shipley and we need to build on and sustain this approach and recognise the need for hyper local investment to create economic and community infrastructure.

The District is also home to collaborative and ground-breaking approaches to evaluating early interventions from which the whole country can learn.

The adoption of these recommendations will build on our asset base and our learning through COVID-19 to help the District stay resilient throughout Winter, maintain critical services through this year and beyond and build an inclusive recovery.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Key financial issues are set out at Section 5 of this report. Council resources are insufficient to sustain an on-going response. If financial support from Government to address the costs and challenges of COVID-19 to the Council is not on-going then this will limit the ability to manage the response to the virus including limiting the spread of infections.

Looking ahead, financial certainty, reform of local government funding and adult social care are required in order to maintain local services and support an inclusive economic recovery.

## **8 RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES**

The situation continues to change and is characterised by a very high degree of uncertainty about impact on services and on Council resources. Assessment of risk is being kept under on-going review by senior management. Learning from the first wave of COVID-19 is informing the development of revised business continuity plans and Departmental risk registers which in turn support the Corporate Risk Register and Council Emergency Plan. The West Yorkshire Resilience Forum has oversight of risk relating to potential emergency situations.

## **9. LEGAL APPRAISAL**

The Coronavirus Act 2020 is the government's main legislative change in response to the pandemic. Most of its provisions came into effect on 25th March 2020, but detailed further legislation in the form of statutory instruments, and government guidance have been issued since that date and continue to be published.

The Act has temporarily modified duties and powers relating to social care, mental health, registration of deaths, inquests, the regulation of investigatory powers, gatherings, meeting and events, the postponement of elections, virtual local authority meetings and protection from eviction. Other changes to existing legislation and statutory guidance continue to be monitored by Legal Services.

The restrictions affecting communities are now based on three Tiers, although variations are introduced based on local circumstances. The Council has powers both under Health and Safety and Coronavirus legislation to enforce restrictions as circumstances dictate, but its approach is to secure voluntary compliance wherever possible.

## **10 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY**

COVID-19 has amplified existing inequalities and hit certain people and places hardest. The approach and measures set out in this report seek to ensure that those people most vulnerable to the social, health and economic impacts of COVID-19 get the help and support that they need throughout the pandemic. Longer-term proposals and priorities for investment will improve public service outcomes, increase equality and support a more inclusive and sustainable economy.

## **11 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

As set out in the report considered by Executive on 24 March establishing a sustainable development action plan, the council is committed to supporting the District to be a fair society within environmental limits. The recommendations to Government set out in Section 7 of this report will support measures to secure greater equality and a cleaner, greener zero carbon economy.

## **12 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS**

Working with Government to secure investment in a green economy and in clean transport and technology will play a significant part in the journey to a net zero carbon District and City Region.

## **13 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

The District has seen rising levels of Domestic Abuse and increasing levels of vulnerability particularly among children and young people. Securing additional funding to cover the costs of COVID-19 and related issues would help the Council to sustain increased levels of investment in tackling Domestic Abuse and to ensure sufficient capacity to meet demand for safeguarding services for vulnerable people.

## **14 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT**

None

## **15 TRADE UNION**

The Council continues to work in partnership with our trade unions, informing and consulting on workforce matters and the Council's workforce approach to ensure that our staff are supported and safe through weekly teleconference meetings that continue in addition to re-instating our OJC Level 1 meetings in September. We continue to consult with the trade unions and work together to ensure day to day processes are managed to assist in effective operational delivery and to ensure business as usual matters are dealt with in a timely manner. We are working through our approach to allowances and remuneration for sustaining business critical roles. We continue to work diligently with our wellbeing, public health, occupational safety, procurement and communications colleagues to provide a safe working environment and communicate clear guidance for all our staff and address concerns and provide assurance around the health and wellbeing of staff, infection control, social

distancing, vulnerable groups and protective personal equipment (PPE). We continue to communicate health and wellbeing support, and our approach to COVID-19 risk assessments. Health and safety in Schools remains a challenge locally and nationally with restrictions and continued discussion and monitoring and requests around risk assessments.

## **16 WARD IMPLICATIONS**

All wards are affected by the impact of Coronavirus and the Council and we are working with communities and Councillors at a local level in all parts of the District.

## **17 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING**

Not applicable

## **18 RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Executive:

- 18.1 Notes the range and scale of activity undertaken to date by Council services. working with partners to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic the outstanding nature of that collective effort and puts on record its thanks to everyone involved for their on-going work in supporting the communities and businesses of the District during a time of unprecedented difficulty and uncertainty.
- 18.2 Notes the key areas of focus for the Council over the winter months and the pressures on services and resources and requires all services to develop business continuity and contingency plans.
- 18.3 Notes that Council capacity and resources are stretched to the limit and that the need to respond to any further emergency would inevitably reduce the resources available to minimise and prevent infection deliver key services, support our communities and economy and plan for the future.
- 18.4 Agrees the recommendations to Government set out at section 7 of this report, endorses them as the basis on which to negotiate and position Bradford District with Government as a key partner in preventing and minimising the spread of infection, staying resilient over Winter, maintaining vital services, levelling up the national economy and securing public sector reform.
- 18.5 Requests the Chief Executive to ensure that Government is made aware of the Council's position and seek a meeting with Ministers to discuss how we work more effectively together through the pandemic and in building a better future.

## **19 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None