

**REPORT TO:** CABINET

**DATE:** 10 SEPTEMBER 2020

**TITLE:** REPORT OF THE COVID-19 RECOVERY WORKING GROUP

**PORTFOLIO HOLDER:** COUNCILLOR EUGENIE HARVEY, DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY

**LEAD OFFICER:** BRIAN KEANE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE (01279) 446004

**This is not a Key Decision  
It is on the Forward Plan as Decision Number I011722  
Call-In Procedures may apply  
This decision will affect no ward specifically**

**RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:**

- A** Approves the Covid-19 Recovery Working Group's final Terms of Reference (attached as Appendix A to the report).
- B** Agrees the Vision Statement and Corporate Themes, and Action Plan (attached as appendices B and C to the report).
- C** Recommends to Full Council that a further Corporate Priority of 'Resilience and Recovery' is introduced into an amended Corporate Plan with the associated Action Plan.

**REASON FOR DECISION**

- A** The Council has taken steps to respond, and begin the process of social and economic recovery of Harlow as the country continues to deal the Covid-19 pandemic. It has established a Working Group to work with Officers on a recovery action plan. This report brings forward proposals for the action plan.
- B** The report also recommends the adoption of the terms of reference for the Working Group and a vision of the recovery of Harlow.

**BACKGROUND**

1. The Working Group has met on three occasions since the last Cabinet meeting. Since that meeting the Portfolio Holder and Officers have continued to take actions on recovery within the four agreed workstreams. An update on those

actions was provided at the Working Group meeting on 5 August and is included as Appendix D to this report. This details the focus of the groups and a number of immediate measures that workstreams have implemented.

## **ISSUES/PROPOSALS**

### **Terms of Reference**

2. At its second meeting on 5 August, the Working Group considered and approved its terms of reference (attached as Appendix A to the report). They set out the overview of the ongoing recovery action plan and the proposed focus of:
  - a) Developing greater community resilience;
  - b) Educating the public about health risks and working to mitigate future outbreaks; and
  - c) Advancing the post-COVID local economy.

### **Vision Statement**

3. The Working Group, at its meeting on 25 August, agreed the Vision Statement and Corporate Themes (attached as Appendix B to the report) which are brought to this meeting for approval. The proposed Vision is as follows:
  - a) “To harness the positive aspects of the community response to the Covid-19 crisis and address the negative outcomes such that the Harlow that emerges - its residents, businesses and voluntary groups – is stronger, more resilient and poised to take full strategic advantage of the opportunities for growth and renewal.”
4. The Vision Statement is supported by the themes for recovery “promoting within everything that it does for the recovery of the town, the strategic priorities of its Corporate Plan”. This includes a new Strategic Priority: Recovery and Resilience which will require Full Council approval supported by the proposed Action Plan. The themes also include objectives for each of the workstreams which inform the actions within the Action Plan. Further work will be done to develop community communication messaging from the vision document.

### **Action Plan**

5. The Working Group has also considered an Action Plan (attached as Appendix C to the report) to support the achievement of recovery. The Action Plan is split into actions for each of the four workstreams. This document will form the starting point for work through the workstreams, but will be a dynamic plan, kept under review by the Working Group, which will need to develop longer term sustainable actions informed by ongoing work..

6. All four documents form a central part of the Council's strategic framework in leading Harlow's recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic
7. It is recommended that the final terms of reference, Vision Statement and Corporate Themes and draft Action Plan are approved. A suggested amendment to the Corporate Plan is recommended to Full Council for approval. The actions attributed to that additional priority will be those contained within the recovery plan.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Environment and Planning (Includes Sustainability)**

As set out in the reports to the working group

**Author: Andrew Bramidge, Head of Environment and Planning**

### **Finance (Includes ICT, and Property and Facilities)**

As set out in the reports to the working group

**Author: Simon Freeman, Head of Finance and Property and Deputy to the Chief Executive**

### **Housing**

As set out in the reports to the working group

**Author: Andrew Murray, Head of Housing**

### **Community Wellbeing (Includes Equalities and Social Inclusion)**

As set out in the reports to the working group

**Author: Jane Greer, Head of Community Wellbeing**

### **Governance (Includes HR)**

As set out in the reports to the working group, change to the Corporate Plan fall within the Policy Framework and are a matter for the Council to approve.

**Author: Simon Hill, Head of Governance**

## **Background Papers**

Those included within reports to the Working Group

<http://moderngov.harlow.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=299>

## **Appendices**

Appendix A – Terms of Reference for the Working Group

Appendix B – Vision and Themes for recovery

Appendix C – Current Action Plan for recovery

Appendix D – Update Circulated by the Chair of the Working Group on 23 July 2020 on Workstream Activities and Immediate Actions

## Covid-19 Recovery Working Group

### Terms of Reference

- (i) To advise the Portfolio Holder on the proposals contained within the developing pandemic action plan including short, medium and long term objectives and measures taking into account the changing landscape.
- (ii) To provide a forum for consultation on measures and strategy within the pandemic action plan
- (iii) To advise and comment on work with regional health officials to prepare for and mitigate any further outbreak or second wave of infection in Harlow;
- (iv) To identify Council-related impacts that may require additional resources or service delivery methods; and
- (v) To provide a focus for:

#### *Developing greater community resilience*

- community action, cohesion, and greater resilience.
- supporting the recovery of BAME communities, clinically extremely vulnerable and other marginalised groups
- engagement with the voluntary sector and faith-based communities

#### *Educating the public about health risks and working to mitigate future outbreaks*

- preparation and planning to ensure, with other public sector agencies, that in the face of future outbreaks or emergencies, all residents are given the best possible health protection and outcomes, particularly those at risk of health inequalities.
- community education on the on-going public health risk and to mitigate future outbreaks

#### *Advancing the post-COVID local economy*

- proposals for new ways of working
- business engagement
- innovative ways of growing the local economy

- (vi) To harness data and monitor recovery performance to ensure that services delivered post COVID, meet the changing needs of residents and businesses.

**Vision for the Recovery of Harlow**

*“To harness the positive aspects of the community response to the Covid-19 crisis and address the negative outcomes such that the Harlow that emerges - its residents, businesses and voluntary groups – is stronger, more resilient and poised to take full strategic advantage of the opportunities for growth and renewal.”*

## **We will achieve this by:**

### **Corporate Themes**

Promoting within everything that it does for the recovery of the town, the strategic priorities of its Corporate Plan:

- Recovery and Resilience (NEW – subject to Council approval)
- More and Better Housing
- Regeneration and a Thriving Economy
- Wellbeing and Social Inclusion
- A Clean and Green Environment
- Successful Children and Young People

Acknowledging the role that the Working Group will have in promoting a plan for recovery.

Managing and recording Harlow Council's recovery response to the COVID-19 pandemic to meet its priorities as a community leader, and fulfil the requirements as a local authority under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to "take the lead in facilitating the rehabilitation of the community and the restoration of the environment."

Seeking to remove the barriers that keep people beyond the reach of employment, services, jobs and other socio-economic recovery measures and opportunities.

Maximising the opportunities for innovative ways of future working across the Council and with partners, its own LATCO and other stakeholders (such as the voluntary sector) to the benefit of the local community and business sector.

Preparation and planning to ensure, with other public sector agencies, that in the face of future outbreaks or emergencies, all residents are given the best possible health protection and outcomes, particularly those at risk of health inequalities.

Securing the best possible regeneration and infrastructure improvement outcomes for the town across the wider HGGT area in the context that they promote residents' health and wellbeing and economic recovery.

Harnessing data and monitoring performance to ensure that services delivered post COVID-19, meet the changing needs of residents and businesses.

Ensuring the community is kept informed about Council's and other related bodies' actions to keep them safe and prioritise their well-being as we adjust to a new and uncertain reality and seek to build individual and collective resilience.

## **Workstream Themes**

### **Community Impact:**

1. To ensure the physical, mental, and socio-economic wellbeing of all residents of Harlow is recovered to pre-pandemic levels or above through analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the community by undertaking data analysis; initiating meaningful dialogue with community, voluntary sector, faith and cultural organisations and utilising feedback from the Council's frontline services.
2. To maintain a robust and thriving community and voluntary sector by maximising promotion and take-up of Government initiatives to support the sector and community; facilitating meaningful engagement and partnership working and supporting the development of new initiatives to meet needs identified through COVID-19 community impact assessment

### **Business & Economy Workstream,**

1. Increase the opportunities for advice, information, incentives and financial support to Harlow businesses, equipping them with the tools to prosper through the recovery phase.
2. Create and deliver a programme of active promotion of the Harlow economy to maximise opportunities for local businesses, to encourage business-to-business and local supply chain activity and to maximise the impact of the "Harlow pound"
3. Ensure young people in Harlow have access to information, advice, and opportunities for work and/or training to prevent a large cohort of young people emerging in Harlow without meaningful activity.
4. Securing partnerships with bodies and educational institutions to create a joined-up plan to promote the need for local employment opportunities, particularly for young people aged 18-24.
5. To actively look for examples of new ways of working and new business opportunities and to innovate them in Harlow.

### **Council Internal Services Workstream**

1. To plan for the new 'normal' and any changes and/or challenges this may present to the Council's operating model and structures.
2. To ensure the continuation and where necessary the restoration of service provision to Harlow residents and businesses.
3. To work with all government guidance to ensure that strategic objectives are compliant and Covid safe.
4. Harnessing data and monitoring performance to ensure that services delivered post COVID-19, meet the changing needs of residents and businesses.

### **HTS Group Workstream**

1. To improve business resilience and efficiency by a review of HTS business plans, priorities and business continuity; enhanced communication plans aligned to Council communication plans and a robust gap analysis and performance reporting.
2. To reassess HTS community impact by its social value programme and reporting.

3. To monitor HTS environmental impact through its landscape programmes and policies reviews.
4. To create opportunities through the HTS Group business and commercial growth plans, particularly in the area of apprenticeships, training and employment for young people.
5. To show leadership within the local business community with regards to creating local opportunities for local people.

<b>Workstream: Community Impact</b>		<b>Lead Officers: Jane Greer      Deputy Lead Officer: Andrew Bramidge</b>			
<p><b>Objectives / Areas of Work:</b> 1. To ensure the physical, mental, and socio-economic wellbeing of all residents of Harlow is recovered to pre-pandemic levels or above through analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the community by undertaking data analysis; initiating meaningful dialogue with community, voluntary sector, faith and cultural organisations and utilising feedback from the Council's frontline services.</p> <p>2. To maintain a robust and thriving community and voluntary sector by maximising promotion and take-up of Government initiatives to support the sector and community; facilitating meaningful engagement and partnership working and supporting the development of new initiatives to meet needs identified through COVID-19 community impact assessment</p>					
<b>Number:</b>	<b>Area of Focus</b>	<b>Identified Programmes / Projects / Schemes</b>	<b>What Can be Delivered? Or desired end state?</b>	<b>Comments: Resources required or constraining factors e.g. Influence only, requires work by other authorities</b>	<b>Likely Target Timescales</b>
COM1	To ensure the physical, mental and socio-economic wellbeing of all residents of Harlow is recovered to pre-pandemic levels or above through analysis of the impact of Covid-19 on the community by undertaking data analysis; initiating meaningful dialogue with community. voluntary sector, faith and cultural organisations and utilising feedback from the Council's front line services.	Identify data that can be collated from Harlow Council front line services, social media, website, Policy and Performance Team and Essex County Councils analytics team, and the Clinical Commissioning Group	Up to date information from as many sectors of the community and government and other data sources that are available for analysis and use to ensure we understand the impact of Covid 19.	Officer time . Essex County Council input required. Potentially new system to capture all of this information.	Sep-20
COM2		Reinstate full tenancy support and supported housing services with the re-opening of communal areas within sheltered housing schemes enabling reduction of social isolation and inappropriate hospital admission	Reduced social isolation. Less hospital admissions, less call on support from Adult Social Care.	Government guidance Staff time. Additional cost of increased cleaning regime	Oct-20
COM3		Work with partners to support transition of placements under covid 19 from temporary accommodation to more settled accommodation	Successful rehousing of covid 19 homeless clients into more settled accommodation to prevent rough sleeping	Availability of suitable and affordable accommodation may be a constraint. Grant funding. On the engagement of client for support	Nov-20

COM4		Develop innovative solutions to help people to access Harlow's culture and heritage sectors virtually. Identify cultural venues, services and other leisure activities that have been adversely affected by loss of income from Covid 19	Culture and Arts summer school to assist children who have missed learning opportunities whilst schools are closed. Undertake audience survey to identify peoples concerns re Covid 19 and attending events Look at digital and virtual solutions to enable access to relevant services, i.e. virtual access by residents, schools and other groups etc.	Funding from Carnival budget 2020 diverted to summer school activities staff time Additional funding for potential solutions may be required	Mar-21
COM5		Provide School readiness activities on line to help ensure children starting school in September 2020 have the skills to be ready to learn and achieve.	Online activities delivered to young people and their carers	Staff time.	Aug-20
COM6		Promote debt management and financial advice services and keep under review and government initiatives and guidance.	Review Council Debt recovery processes. Maximise residents' access to relevant benefits. Assist residents to access financial support services and local initiatives	Partnership working. Assess whether Harlow Council, government agencies and the community and voluntary sector have the capability and resources to respond.	Sep-20
COM7		Promote Better Health campaign and Mental Health and Wellbeing advice. Support public health campaigns to minimise covid 19 health impacts, ensuring the needs of volunteers are considered as well as other sections of the community	Better and improved physical and mental health, therefore be better prepared to deal with Covid 19 if affected current or in the future, for residents and volunteers	staff time campaign costs.	October 20 and ongoing

COM8	Maintain a robust and thriving community and voluntary sector by maximising promotion and take up of Government initiatives to support the sector and community; facilitating meaningful engagement and partnership working and supporting the development of new initiatives to meet needs identified through Covid 19 community impact assessment.	Work with the CVS and other partners to identify specific third sector recovery support needs and priorities to establish a multi agent forum to address local needs through community impact assessment	Survey of third sector support needs undertaken, Understanding of how Harlow communities have been disproportionately affected (possible survey and well as focus groups)	Staff time	Aug-20
COM9		Undertake a community impact assessment to assess any disproportionate effects of Covid 19 on disadvantaged groups and communities, for example BAME and disabled people.	Support local community, faith and voluntary groups to identify and maintain support for the most vulnerable people impacted by Covid 19. Work with mental health organisations to provide targeted support to BAME and disabled people impacted by Covid 19	Partnership working with other agencies, voluntary and charity sector. Some financial resource may be required.	October 20 and ongoing
COM10		Support the work of charitable and other organisations to tackle the impact of Domestic Abuse that has been heightened during the lockdown period	To identify the level of domestic abuse in Harlow and any increases due to Covid 19, and work with partners to address any shortfalls in service provision or support for victims	Staff time willingness of agencies to work together Potential financial support required	Mar-21
COM11		Work with Mental Health organisations to provide targeted support to BAME and disabled young people impacted by Covid 19.	Identification of sections of the community that have been adversely affected by the effects of Covid 19.	Staff time Possible communications costs, i.e. leaflets etc	Mar-21
COM12		Engage with local organisations that have existing links to BAME communities and local disability groups to ensure the Council's approach to community recovery takes into account the diversity of the town.	Set up a regular community forum to enable regular engagement and feedback from BAME communities and local disability groups Five point Government guidance to BAME communities followed.	Zoom facility. Ensure suitable access arrangements for community groups, i.e. access to IT.	03/09/2020 then ongoing

<b>Workstream: Business &amp; Economy</b>	<b>Lead Officer: Andrew Bramidge</b>	<b>Deputy Lead Officer: Jane Greer</b>
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**Objectives / Areas of Work:** 1. Collating data to identify the impact of Covid-19 on the local economy and establishing a baseline to enable us to monitor progress throughout the recovery phase.  
2. Increase the opportunities for advice, information and financial support to local businesses, working with local business support agencies.  
3. Development of a programme to actively promote Harlow businesses to maximise the potential of the 'Harlow Pound'.  
4. Creation of a local partnership to maximise the take up of apprenticeship and job placement programmes with the Council playing a leadership role.  
5. Ensure young people in Harlow have access to information, advice and opportunities for work and/or training.  
6. Identify ways in which existing Council service delivery can be utilised to support Covid recovery measures in the local economy.  
7. Supporting communications to local businesses to assist in the prevention of a second wave of infections.

<b>Number:</b>	<b>Area of Focus</b>	<b>Identified Programmes / Projects / Schemes</b>	<b>What Can be Delivered? Or desired end state?</b>	<b>Comments: Resources required or constraining factors e.g. Influence only, requires work by other authorities</b>	<b>Likely Target Timescales</b>
BE1	Prevention of second wave of infection	Prepare protocols (and implement when needed) for communicating actions on increasing infections	Communications issued when required resulting in behaviour change	Environmental Health, Comms, Essex Resilience Forum	Ongoing
BE2	Collation of data	Identify what data can be collated within the Council's Policy and Performance team	List of data available for monthly collation	Input from Policy & Performance	End of August
		Identify what data can be supplied by Essex County Council	List of data available for monthly collation	Input from ECC	End of August
		Regular liaison with major employers in Harlow to gather intelligence	Regular views of local business on the impact of Covid	Resourced through Regeneration team	September
		Undertake regular business surveys	Regular views of local business on the impact of Covid	Identify if this can be done in-house or needs external commission	End of September

BE3	Business information, advice & support	Maximise the provision of Government grant support to Harlow businesses	Full utilisation of Government funds	Delivery through Revs & Bens team	August
		Develop social media platform to connect with local businesses	Ensure two way connections with local business community	Regen and Comms teams to lead	September - commence
		Work with Harlow Chamber of Commerce to increase information to businesses	Initial online workshop followed by ongoing joint Council -Chamber programme	Avalability of resources in Regen team and at Harlow Chamber. Involvement of NWES.	September
		Ensure all Council commercial tenants have full access to Covid information	Regular flow of information	Joint working between Property & Facilities and Revs & Bens	Ongoing
		Signpost Harlow businesses to NHS 'Working Well' programme	Referrals from Harlow into the Essex Covid Recovery programme	Environmental Health & Regen teams	Ongoing
		Explore potential for utilising empty town centre retail unit to be used as a temporary business advice centre	Determine the feasibility and potential location	Work with Water Gardens and Harvey Centre management	September
BE4	Promotion of Harlow businesses	Identify what more can be done to prioritise local businesses in the council's procurement	More local companies being given the opportunity to compete for Council business	Need to ensure compliance with procurement policy. May necessitate some changes to procurement practice across service areas.	September
		Explore potential for local 'Meet the Buyers' event, possibly in early 2021	More opportunities for local businesses to trade with each other	Can this be a physical event, or online goods and service matching?	November
		Utilise 'Discover Harlow' brand to deliver inward investment marketing campaign for Harlow and promote local success stories	Marketing campaign launched for Harlow with enquiry handling service	Work with Innovation Corridor	November
		Work with 'anchor' institutions to support local supply chain, learning from PHE impact report	More local small companies supplying larger purchasers	Work with PHE, PAH, College and larger businesses	October
		Harlow Council to promote use of town centre and neighbourhood centres	Increasing footfall	Regeneration team and Comms team	September
		Develop business awards scheme	Identification of local success stories	Work with Harlow Chamber and Heart 4 Harlow	November
		Implement new signage scheme to improve awareness of neighbourhood centres and local hatches	Increasing footfall	Regeneration and Property & Facilities teams	October
BE5	Create partnership to lead local employment initiatives	Identify opportunities within Harlow Council to utilise job placement programme	Increase trainee positions in Council and support local workforce	Budgetary constraints	October
		Develop partnership of leading organisations in Harlow to promote employment initiatives	Harlow Council working as community leader	Work through Growth Board; involvement of DWP	September

		Develop programme of improving digital skills for businesses to help them deal with the 'new normal'	Number of Harlow businesses signing up to a programme	Work with existing business support providers, Harlow College, ARU etc.	October
BE6	Support to young people	Identify opportunities within Harlow Council to increase apprenticeships	Increase trainee positions in Council and support local workforce	Budgetary constraints	October
		Ensure an adequate advice and guidance programme is in place for all young people in Harlow	Clear referral mechanism in place and support to enable work-readiness	Work with Harlow College and other existing providers	September
BE6	Council service delivery	Ensure a focus on Covid recovery for local businesses is woven into Corporate Plan and service delivery	Measures delivered that specifically target Covid recovery as an aim	SMB to identify and discuss with Members. Work through Growth Board.	Ongoing

<b>Workstream: Council Business Impact</b>	<b>Lead Officer: Simon Freeman</b>	<b>Deputy Lead Officer: Simon Hill</b>
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- Objectives / Areas of Work:**
1. To plan for the new 'normal' and any changes and/or challenges this may present to the Council's operating model and structures.
  2. To ensure the continuation and where necessary the restoration of service provision to Harlow residents and businesses.
  3. To work with all government guidance to ensure that strategic objectives are compliant and Covid safe.
  4. Harnessing data and monitoring performance to ensure that services delivered post COVID-19, meet the changing needs of residents and businesses.

<b>Number:</b>	<b>Area of Focus</b>	<b>Identified Programmes / Projects / Schemes</b>	<b>What Can be Delivered? Or desired end state?</b>	<b>Comments: Resources required or constraining factors e.g. Influence only, requires work by other authorities</b>	<b>Likely Target Timescales</b>
CB1	Covid -Secure compliance	Corporate risks assessments, operational and staffing advices, PPE process, on going review of activities restricted by social distancing	Covid-secure workplace risk assessment for each premises re-opened, PPE identification and central issue process	Internal resources required	June 2020 - complete, risk assessment review on going based on changes to government guidance
CB2	Outdoor community and leisure sites	Playgrounds, car parks, MUGAs, pitches, Pets Corner, Town Park	Re-opening of facilities when government guidance permits and covid-secure arrangements can practically be implemented	Internal resources required, dependant on government guidance/restrictions	Aug-20
CB3	Indoor community and leisure sites	Playhouse, Museum, Nature Reserve, public conveniences, Leah Manning Centre, Sam's Place	Re-opening of facilities when government guidance permits and covid-secure arrangements can practically be implemented	Internal resources required, dependant on government guidance/restrictions	Aug-20

CB4	External facing HDC Operational sites	Civic Centre, Latton Bush Centre, Bus Terminus	Expansion of available facilities, including cash office, to members of the public when government guidance permits and covid-secure arrangements can practically be implemented	Internal resources required, dependant on government guidance/restrictions	Jul-20
CB5	Refining homeworking protocols and processes	CT homeworker kit standardisation, continuation of existing Telephony and ICT system upgrade programme	Increased capacity and resilience for homeworking processes put in place during emergency phase of COVID response	Internal resources	On going - commenced
CB6	Income Recovery	Housing rent recovery, leaseholder contributions, Commercial rent recovery, Benefit overpayment recovery, Council tax and NDR recovery, sundry debtors	Re-instate recovery processes to ensure income recovery can recommence to operate at normal levels	Internal resources required - dependant on courts service and external enforcement agents	On going - commenced
CB7	Enforcement	Environmental crime, ASB, illegal encampments,	Re-instate recovery processes to ensure enforcement can recommence to operate at normal levels	Internal resources	On going - commenced
CB8	Consultation and communications	External events, statutory consultations, panels and improvement boards	Alternative covid-secure delivery mechanisms (likely virtual)	Internal resources	On going - commenced
CB9	Virtualisation of face to face processes	Housing allocations, taxi licensing, car park permits, site visits for EHS, Housing services, supported Housing management	Web based alternative processes implemented	Internal resources	On going - commenced
CB10	Test and Trace	Essex and Southend Local outbreak plan	MOU agreed and Plan finalised, and Harlow ready for implementation when triggered	Internal resources, part of county-wide response	July 2020 - MOU in place, on going activity to meet plan requirements
CB11	Impact analysis of COVID19	Data identification, collection and analysis	Dashboard of metrics showing impact across town	Internal resources, dependant on some externally collected data	On going - not yet commenced

<b>Workstream: HTS</b>	<b>Lead Officer: Andrew Murray</b>	<b>Deputy Lead Officer: John Phillips</b>
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2. To reassess HTS community impact by its social value programme and reporting.  
3. To monitor HTS environmental impact through its landscape programmes and policies reviews.  
4. To create opportunities through the HTS Group business and commercial growth plans, particularly in the area of apprenticeships, training and employment for young people.  
5. To show leadership within the local business community with regards to creating local opportunities for local people.

<b>Number:</b>	<b>Area of Focus</b>	<b>Identified Programmes / Projects / Schemes</b>	<b>What Can be Delivered? Or desired end state?</b>	<b>Comments: Resources required or constraining factors e.g. Influence only, requires work by other authorities</b>	<b>Likely Target Timescales</b>
HTS1	Business Resilience and Efficiency	Review of HTS Business Plans, Priorities and Business Continuity. Enhanced communication plans aligned to Council communication plans. Robust gap analysis and performance reporting.	Published updated/revised HSE (Covid 19) Standards. Enhanced Customer Access through digital channels. Aligned business plan/financial reporting, governance and timelines.	Capacity and Shareholder/Board governance arrangements	Oct-20
HTS2	Community Impact	Social value programme and reporting.	Enhanced social value demonstrated. Development/promotion of scrutiny reporting, and improved transparency with better measurement.	Needs wider Council community engagement approach.	Mar-21
HTS3	Environmental Impact	Landscape programmes and Policies reviews.	Action forcing and alignments of policies. Removal of unnecessary duplication. Simplified reporting and service offer.	Resources available and robust client briefs (planned tree programme/grass cutting). Prioritised timing and alignment to Council risks.	Sep-21
HTS4	Creating Opportunities	Business and Commercial growth plans.	Long term plans resourced and prioritised. Targeted resourcing and priorities.	Council plans/ambition and corporate plan priorities.	Mar-21

HTS5	local business community leadership	TBA	Creating local opportunities for local people	TBA	TBA
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## Item 5 – Response phase

1. I want to take a few moments to bring members up to speed on how the Council has responded to the Pandemic and challenges that it has faced since the beginning of the year. I have heard some criticism that the Council has been slow to react and want to put our discussions in context.
2. In February, a multi service team was convened to look at the rising issues for the Council for its safe operation and staff welfare under its Business Continuity Plans. The Council has a Corporate Business Continuity Plan and individual Service-related plans in place. Traditionally, business continuity plans reflect the plan to react to a sudden loss of resources, in this case the Council had to plan for the gradual loss of services.
3. Early issues included:
  - Enabling the workforce to work remotely – most of the Council’s staff had no facility of working from home initially and demands on external technology suppliers nationally was significant to which our IT service responded brilliantly.
  - Putting in place monitoring of service impacts and staff sickness/shielding
  - With the Board members, decisions on the early closure of Council facilities including the Civic Offices, other Council buildings (Leah Manning Centre, Playhouse etc.), playgrounds, car parks
4. The Response has also:
  - Facilitated initial set up of Community Hub service; delivered as a joint initiative between Rainbow Services and Harlow Council – this has included council staff redeployment to service the Hub on a seven days a week basis, working with rainbow services on essential food deliveries throughout lockdown, individual welfare calls to category A and B residents (3000), liaising with other agencies for referrals and dealing with significant social issues created by the pandemic that would otherwise have been dealt with by social care services.
  - Worked with County and National planning agencies to ensure a coordinated response for those shielding and residents requiring assistance – this has included a coordinated reporting mechanism and liaison, a seamless referrals process for those requiring local hub help and action with Essex Welfare Services and other partner agencies. Support for excess death plans (with Westerleigh) and more recently local containment plans.
  - The council has paid out £11.4m to 841 local businesses in a measured way. The Council has given extended retail relief to 524 business rate payers, totalling around £17.5m and paid out £933,000 of government hardship

grants to 4,800 residents receiving Council Tax support. Officers are now assessing the many applications made by businesses to the Discretionary Business Grant Scheme which aims to support small and micro businesses that are struggling due to the coronavirus shutdown but are unable to access other government grant funding. All of these things have been achieved against a payment enforcement moratorium, a remote workforce and maintaining contact with residents having difficulty in paying.

- Introduced measures to create safe working environments at the Civic Centre and Latton Bush Centre to allow critical Council and third party services (including NHS teams) to continue, this has meant that contact teams have been asked to work right through, as essential workers, using social distancing at the civic centre, works have also been done to the receptions to enable safer working and the recent successful reopening of the civic centre to the public.
- For our Housing Teams the challenge has been in meeting Housing need. During the period Housing had to accommodate an additional 36 people who were sleeping rough where previously there had been only a handful identified on regular counts. Additionally, Housing has been supporting the increased hardship being evidenced through loss of income. Housing have offered support/signposting benefit/support take up, and development of payment plans,
- The Council has a stay on legal action until the end of August. The increase in Universal Credit Claimants has led to a delay in paying but there is evidence that the reopening of the cash office has meant more have paid arrears. Face to face visits have been undertaken and staff has demonstrated a willingness to work differently to ensure service provision to vulnerable tenants. Online applications processes have been developed to aid the public and within 48 hours of the new Housing Application form going live, a month's worth of applications had been made.
- Made decisions in public interest on the short-term suspension of Council facilities and services and set in motion groundwork for recovery work to commence re-delivery. Whilst facilities such as Pets Corner and The Playhouse have remained closed, staff have been undertaking engagement work, online creative projects and accelerating maintenance works so they are ready to open when it is as soon as safe to do so. Staff have also been redeployed to support other recovery activities.
- The Council has operated in a fast-moving policy environment with government guidance being issued or changed almost daily. Restrictions and relaxations of COVID 19 related guidelines have required many dynamic changes to operation of services. The Council, in its community leadership role, has also promoted the wellbeing of Harlow residents, through its communications so the resident understood the appropriate responses at

each stage of the pandemic to mitigate risk to themselves and protect safety of others. Advice and help have been given to business to reopen safely by our environment team.

- The Council has dealt with over 60,000 enquiries\* (calls, emails, online forms, applications and social media messages) during the pandemic with more than 24,000 people visiting our coronavirus support information on our website.
  - We have worked with our HTS partners to maintain their emergency responses for residents during the lockdown period, implemented safe working practices for their staff and the public they visit and worked collaboratively to bring back both housing and environmental services quickly so that impact to residents could be mitigated and services continue as close to normal as possible
  - Our Waste contractor, Veolia, and their bin crews have provided a service throughout the lockdown period and collected over 2,824 tonnes of non-recycling, 1,402 tonnes of recycling and 557 tonnes of food waste in April and May
5. The Response Team initially met daily with reporting to a daily Senior Management Board / HTS meeting. This work is now being wound down as many of the staff are involved in moving to recovery Workstream activities and as council activities recover, to their substantive roles. Measures implemented have meant that only one staff member has fallen ill to Covid 19 and recovered. Staff have adapted to new ways of working and continue to work remotely for the foreseeable future.
6. The Council has also quickly established a portfolio with specific responsibility for recovery and a mechanism for formal members involvement through this cross-party Working Group.

### **Item 6(a) – Workstreams**

The following are update notes from Workstream Leads

#### **Community Impact – Lead Jane Greer:**

The following subgroups have been established to look at impact on our community covering the following themes.

- Arts and Culture
- Homelessness, Supported Housing and tenancy support
- Third Sector, BAME, Faith, disabled and other groups community impacts

There has also been a discussion on how a cross working group subgroup needs to be set up to look at

- Data – collection of and analysis

The key points so far are:

### **Arts and Culture Subgroup**

This sub group focuses on arts & cultural venues and activities that are run by the Council or which the Council has a significant involvement in e.g. Playhouse, Gibberd Gallery, Museum, Carnival, Fireworks, Christmas Lights – also Council venues that are used by community based groups e.g. Latton Bush, Potter Street. A later stage may be to provide advice/support to non-Council linked groups/venues. Action planning to be focussed on two areas:

- Maintaining audience engagement and some activity where possible, particularly in the summer
- Preparing plans for re-opening (even if this may be many months away). Although this will feed into the internal group

### **Homelessness and supported housing and tenancy support Subgroup**

Focusing on supported housing, homelessness including rough sleepers and victims of domestic abuse, allocations and tenancy support

Areas of focus will include:

- Establishing a plan to re-introduce support visits for older persons housing
- Planning for re-opening communal areas in older persons housing
- In relation to tenancy support, the level of family support has increased during lockdown, family members have been off work or furloughed, however as this support decreases and people return to work then support services need to increase to meet demand.
- Developing farther the existing Rough Sleepers Action to help mitigate the effects of Covid 19 on homeless people.

### **Third Sector, BAME, Faith, disabled and other groups community impacts**

Looking and at implementing support to aid recovering from the pandemic to the third sector, faith groups, BAME groups and others. Examples include:

- Supporting local community and voluntary groups to maintain support for the most vulnerable groups after Shielding ceases.
- Though local faith groups, identify specific support needs to assist community recovery

- Support local organisations that have links to BAME communities to identify specific recovery support needs

### **Council Business Impact – Lead Simon Freeman**

Work of this workstream has the following key points

- Vast majority of council services have been maintained throughout.
- Extremely quick response to the government decision and national crisis in March to enable the above to happen.
- Public facing services temporarily suspended to comply with guidance and protect public/staff
- Some workers unable to undertake normal duties have been redeployed to support other activity (such as Community Hub, town Centre etc.
- Corporate Covid Risk Assessment completed and Covid Certification in Civic/Latton Bush

Now focusing on bringing service to the public back including –

- Public Toilets (reopened w/c 6 July)
- Civic Centre (reopened w/c 6 July)
- Car Parks (reopened w/c 6 July)
- Museum Garden (due to open 25 July)
- Playgrounds (Due to open by the end of July)
- Playhouse – some phased opening from w/c 20 July

During lockdown lots of work on using online service access with big win on the development of Housing Applications online. Work continues to develop these points of service access moving forward.

### **Business & Economy Workstream – Lead Andrew Bramidge**

#### **1. Advice and support to businesses**

- Provision of Government grant support to Harlow businesses
- Direct businesses towards local business advisory services e.g. NWES, Growth Hub through partnership social media campaign involving Chambers of Commerce and SELEP
- Promotion of new business start-up support to include co-operatives where risk can be shared
- Improve environment in our employment areas e.g. better signage, transport
- Deliver joint Harlow Council & Harlow Chamber online business support and information event (hosted by Cllr Harvey?)

#### **2. Promotion of Harlow businesses**

- Local Purchasing – what more can the Council do in this regard?
- Local Purchasing – actively promote local purchasing opportunities e.g. by staging a (virtual?) Meet the Buyers event
- Inward investment campaign through Discover Harlow, positioning Harlow as key location in the UK Innovation Corridor
- Work with 'Anchor' institutions to support the local supply chain; learn from PHE Impact report
- Develop opportunities to create new forms of flexible business space e.g. co-working to enable new business creation, potentially using our commercial asset portfolio
- Immediately switch to active promotion of Harlow Town Centre, neighbourhood centres, retail parks and Harlow's hospitality sector. Focus of activity of 'Shop Local' e.g. through apps such as 'Shop Appy'
- Promotion of Harlow business success stories via Discover Harlow focussing on companies that are doing well at present and potentially linking them to supply chain opportunities
- Develop Covid related Business Awards scheme with Harlow Chamber and Heart 4 Harlow
- Fast track signage project to improve awareness of local shopping hatches.

#### **HTS Group Workstream – Lead Andrew Murray**

- Played a leading role in supporting the C/Hub, providing vans, volunteer resources, and storage accommodation for food parcels etc.
- Played a leading role in procuring PPE equipment ensuring "fit for purpose", establishing reliable markets/supply chain, interpreting complex/changing govt H and S guidance into adapting business processes, arranging Covid Secure office arrangements
- Established a "remote contact centre" quickly for responding to customer emergencies/enquiries.
- Worked well with local/national trade unions, in partnership, to provide support to employees thru lock down, and get people back to work safely/processes. (HSE)
- National recognition as a playing a leading role in the newly formed LATCo organisation, developing support mechanisms for members

#### **Item 6b - Development of Action Plan**

- Officers are working on producing an Action Plan layout common to all Workstreams
- It is envisaged that the first draft Action Plan will be brought to the Working Group at its August meeting.
- Work will continue on actions in the interim between meetings
- Action Plan will be a 'live' document and subject to change going forward

- Anticipated that the first report will be presented to Cabinet at their meeting in September.

Additionally, and concurrently, the Working Group will align with, inform and strengthen all high level strategic corporate activity, for example work on Harlow Gilston Garden Town, the Town Investment Plan, Town Centre Action Plan and the Corporate Plan

### **Item 6c - Short Term Measures**

This is an opportunity for the Working to suggest measures that could be implemented quickly or could be subject to more work by officers.

#### **Quick Wins for the Community Impact Group**

- Worked with Rainbow Services in the successful operation of the Community Hub
- Planning for Black History Month activities in an alternative and more suitable location
- Development of a summer school e.g. theatre workshops, dance classes, museum activities programme using open air venues
- Promoted and encourage applications for Discretionary Business Rate Scheme
- Will target BAME children and young people for participation in the summer school
- Work with partners to deliver a Holiday hunger scheme at a suitable location.

#### **Quick Wins for the Business and Economic Support Workstream**

- Delivery of joint Harlow Council & Chamber of Commerce online business briefing and engagement event
- Proactive promotional campaign of town centre, neighbourhood centres, retail parks and the town's hospitality sector and 'Harlow Shop Local' campaign
- HDC to develop and lead a local partnership on implementation of Kick Start job placement scheme
- Develop Business Awards scheme to promote and celebrate local businesses
- Dedicated edition of Harlow Times – "Harlow is Open for Business", in late Sept/ early October.

### **Item 6d - Impact on Council Priorities and Corporate Plan**

- The Council agreed its Corporate Plan in February before the onset of the pandemic
- The Plan does not reflect the recovery focus of the Council
- Proposed to add a further Corporate Priority in the next reporting round which will be the September Cabinet meeting

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**MINUTES OF THE COVID-19 RECOVERY WORKING GROUP  
HELD ON**

22 July 2020

6.30 - 8.50 pm

**PRESENT**

**Committee Members**

Councillor Eugenie Harvey (Chair)  
Councillor Simon Carter  
Councillor Joel Charles  
Councillor Tony Durcan  
Councillor Tony Edwards  
Councillor Mark Ingall  
Councillor Andrew Johnson  
Councillor Frances Mason  
Councillor Russell Perrin  
Councillor Nancy Watson

**Officers**

Brian Keane, Chief Executive  
Hannah Criddle, Governance Support Officer  
Andrew Bramidge, Head of Environment and Planning  
Simon Freeman, Head of Finance and Deputy to the Chief Executive  
Jane Greer, Head of Community Wellbeing  
Simon Hill, Head of Governance  
Andrew Murray, Head of Housing  
Adam Rees, Governance Support Officer

1. **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Councillor Harvey welcomed the group to the meeting. She explained that the purpose of the group was to work collaboratively, generate creative ideas and have productive debate. Councillor Harvey explained that three key concerns of hers following the Covid-19 pandemic were unemployment, local businesses and the voluntary sector.

2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Charles declared a pecuniary interest as a remunerated Council appointed director of HTS (Housing and Regeneration) Ltd.

Councillor Carter declared a pecuniary interest as a remunerated Council appointed director of HTS (Property and Environment) Ltd.

#### 4. **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The group considered the Terms of Reference that were shared at the Cabinet meeting on 9 July 2020. It was agreed that it was important to complete a gap analysis and to understand the baseline to help to inform the Terms of Reference and establish a feedback mechanism so performance against the Terms of Reference could be compared.

The group agreed to:

- a) Add a term around the Council working with regional health officials to minimise the risk of a second outbreak in Harlow.
- b) Extend the community action term to include community cohesion and wider engagement including public health education and to focus on the impact on the voluntary sector.
- c) Have specific focus of the impact of Covid-19 on the faith based communities and BAME group.
- d) Have a specific focus on public education in view of the on-going health risk.

It was agreed that the action plan should consider dynamic and static risk.

The amended Terms of Reference would be circulated to the Chair and a representative from the Conservative group for approval before the next meeting.

#### 5. **RESPONSE PHASE - KEY ACTIONS AND DECISIONS**

Councillor Harvey noted some of work completed by the Council during the response phase whilst there was a gradual loss of services and the following had been achieved; enabling 420 officers to work remotely, working with the County Council and shielding agencies creating the Community Hub, awarding grants to local businesses, helping 36 rough sleepers, monitoring staff sickness, creating online creative projects, dealing with 60,000 customer enquiries and HTS emergency work during lockdown. The group requested that this information was circulated as a note to all.

The group considered whether the Council was still in the response phase or had moved into the recovery phase. Councillor Harvey advised that the Council was moving into the recovery phase. Councillor Perrin suggested that the details of the response were written down within a strategic framework for comparison against the groups' terms of reference.

## 6. **RECOVERY PHASE**

### a) Workstreams

Jane Greer, Head of Community and Wellbeing, explained that under the “community impact” work stream, there were four key sub-groups;

- a) Third sector, faith groups, BAME and other communities
- b) Homelessness and supported housing
- c) Arts and culture
- d) Data collection.

Andrew Bramidge, Head of Environment and Planning, explained that the “business impact” work stream would need access to better economic data in order to consider the impact on Harlow. He confirmed that, to date, support had been provided to the retail and hospitality sector for the re-opening of their businesses and to 200 Council business tenants.

Simon Freeman, Head of Finance and Property and Deputy to the Chief Executive, detailed the innovative changes made to services as part of the “council business” work stream. The stream had considered 19 actions for immediate action and was aware of where the Council currently stood with its service and where it needed to get for services in the future.

Andrew Murray, Head of Housing, confirmed that, as part of the “HTS Group” work stream, some service provision was moderate and HTS were working its way through backlogs. HTS had worked well with local and trade unions to support employees and get people back to work safely. Andrew Murray confirmed that the Best Value Review actions were continuing for the contract extension. Themes considered by the work stream included; social value impact, business resilience, commercial impact, environmental impact, the customer experience and creating opportunities.

Brian Keane, Chief Executive, confirmed that as of 22 July 2020 he would be receiving postcode data on the positive Covid-19 tests in Harlow.

The group requested a note on the operational, verbal updates of the officers by the next meeting.

### b) Development of Action Plan

A draft action plan was due to come back to the group in August for Cabinet approval in September. The group agreed it would like to meet before 25 August meeting to work on the draft action plan. A further meeting would be arranged within the next two weeks.

The group agreed that a gap analysis and baseline analysis would be needed to inform an action plan. Councillor Perrin suggested that sustainability should also be considered as part of the action plan. Councillor Charles suggested that a sub-group for the working group was created to consider the overall vision of a post Covid-19 Harlow.

c) Short Term Measures/Quick Wins

Jane Greer confirmed a number of community impact short-term wins including; the community hub, the planned arts and culture summer events, the planned Black History Month events and the work to allocate discretionary business relief grants. Jane Greer advised the group that Rainbow Services would also be organising a survey to consider how groups had been affected by the pandemic.

Andrew Bramidge explained a number of short-term measures for the “Business and Economic Support” work stream;

- a) Mapping – impact monitoring
- b) Advice and support provided to the business community
- c) The promotion of local businesses
- d) Job skills

It was agreed that a note to all members would include the proposals.

d) Impact on Council Priorities and Corporate Plan

Councillor Harvey confirmed that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Council Priorities and Corporate Plan would be reviewed by September.

e) Finance Update

Simon Freeman confirmed that arrangements were changing weekly, however, the Council would be receiving an additional £165,000 of funding from the Government in a further round of grants announced by Government. The position had not changed since the update to Cabinet on 9 July 2020, however, the additional funding would mean that the gap would reduce to around £500,000. Simon Freeman confirmed that the Council was dealing with a forecast based on what was expected. Councillor Ingall confirmed that the returns information sent to the Government would be shared with the Opposition Group.

7. **MEETING FREQUENCY/NEXT STEPS**

The group noted the dates of the next meetings and requested that another meeting was arranged within the next two weeks. Councillor Harvey agreed to email the group to confirm the process outlined and would arrange for requested documents to be circulated to the group.

CHAIR OF THE WORKING GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE COVID-19 RECOVERY WORKING GROUP  
HELD ON**

5 August 2020

6.30 - 7.47 pm

**PRESENT**

**Committee Members**

Councillor Eugenie Harvey (Chair)  
Councillor Simon Carter  
Councillor Joel Charles  
Councillor Tony Durcan  
Councillor Tony Edwards  
Councillor Andrew Johnson  
Councillor Russell Perrin  
Councillor Nancy Watson

**Officers**

Brian Keane, Chief Executive  
Andrew Bramidge, Head of Environment and Planning  
Hannah Criddle, Governance Support Officer  
Simon Freeman, Head of Finance and Deputy to the Chief Executive  
Jane Greer, Head of Community Wellbeing  
Simon Hill, Head of Governance  
Andrew Murray, Head of Housing  
Lisa Thornett, Corporate and Governance Support Officer

8. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received for Councillor Frances Mason.

9. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Carter declared a pecuniary interest as a remunerated Council appointed director of HTS (Property and Environment) Ltd.

Councillor Charles declared a pecuniary interest as a remunerated Council appointed director of HTS (Housing and Regeneration) Ltd.

10. **MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2020 are agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

11. **MATTERS ARISING**

Councillor Johnson noted that at the last meeting the Working Group requested the operational notes of any work stream meetings. Brian

Keane, Chief Executive, confirmed that these would be provided at the next Working Group meeting on 25 August 2020.

Councillor Charles noted that a summary report on data collection and gap analysis would be useful. Councillor Harvey agreed that data analysis would be helpful but explained it would be hard to complete a gap analysis for all work streams. Brian Keane agreed that there could be a gap analysis for the internal and HTS work streams. The Council was working with Essex County Council for data relating to the community and business and economy work streams. Councillor Charles requested an internal gap analysis as soon as possible. Councillor Harvey agreed that this would be sent to the Working Group Sub Group.

Councillor Perrin noted that at the last meeting it was discussed that sustainability was built in to the action plan. Councillor Harvey agreed to look at this and build it in to the action plan.

12. **APPROVE THE FINAL TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Working Group received final Terms of Reference for approval.

Councillor Harvey advised the Working Group that Councillor Mason suggested that the appropriate terminology was “clinically extremely vulnerable”. It was agreed that the Terms of Reference would be amended accordingly.

Councillor Johnson thanked the Chair and Officers for the changes made to the Terms of Reference following discussions earlier on in the week. Councillor Johnson advised that his group was happy to accept the Terms of Reference and welcomed the collaboration between the two parties.

**RESOLVED** that the final Terms of Reference were approved for recommendation to the Cabinet.

13. **APPROVE THE VISION STATEMENT**

The Working Group received the vision statement for approval.

Councillor Charles suggested that the corporate priorities were given short, medium and long term targets. Councillor Charles suggested the three most important priorities at the moment were; infection control and a second wave, business resilience and action to help disadvantaged groups. Councillor Harvey advised that timeline work was going on. Brian Keane confirmed that targets would be part of the action plan.

**RESOLVED** that the vision statement would be amended and brought to the Working Group Sub Group before the full Working Group meeting on 25 August 2020.

14. **DISCUSS AND AGREE THE WORK STREAM OBJECTIVES TAKING VIEWS FROM MEMBERS**

The Working Group received the work stream objectives for discussion and comments.

Councillor Harvey advised the Working Group that at the sub group meeting it was agreed that a Working Group member from each party would be allocated to each work stream. The lead officer of each work stream would provide the members with updates for them to go back to their groups.

Councillor Perrin requested that any updates from Officers were uploaded to Mod.Gov so they were all saved in one place. Simon Hill, Head of Governance, confirmed the documents could be attached to the meeting documents.

Councillor Perrin also requested whether a Covid-19 budget or financial framework could be broken down into the different work streams. Simon Freeman, Head of Finance and Deputy to the Chief Executive, would look into this and have a separate conversation with Councillor Perrin.

Councillor Johnson advised the Working Group that he felt he doesn't have enough information of what falls under each work stream in order to analysis, comment and agree on the objectives. It was agreed that Officers would circulate a scoping paper on the current focus of each work stream.

Councillor Charles suggested the under the Business and Economy work stream, the wording surrounding securing partnerships with other bodies was strengthened. Andrew Bramidge, Head of Environment and Planning, agreed with this.

Overall, the Working Group agreed that it was the responsibility of every work stream to reduce the risk of a second spike of Covid-19.

**RESOLVED** that the work stream objectives were agreed.

15. **UPDATE ON PROGRESS OF ACTION PLAN**

The draft Action Plan would be brought to the Working Group Sub Group within the next couple of weeks and then to the full Working Group on 25 August 2020.

16. **MATTERS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

Councillor Harvey advised the Working Group that the meeting due to take place on Thursday 24 September had been moved to Wednesday 23 September.

CHAIR OF THE WORKING GROUP