

**Executive**

**20 May 2021**

Report of the Chief Operating Officer  
Portfolio of the Leader of the Council

## **City of York Council Recovery and Renewal Strategy – May Update**

### **Summary**

1. This report provides an update on activities both directly in response to Covid-19 and the work to support recovery and renewal. This follows previous Executive decisions to approve the Recovery and Renewal Plan, which frames the Council's recovery activity.
2. In this month's report, there is a consideration of returning to the office, both for the council and city as a whole.
3. It is highly likely given the fast-changing nature of the pandemic that some of the information within this report will have changed between publication and the Executive meeting. Updates will, therefore, be given at the meeting.

### **Recommendations**

4. Executive is asked to:
  - a. Note the contents of the report

### **Background**

5. On 25<sup>th</sup> June 2020, Executive received a report to outline the council's 1-year Recovery and Renewal Strategy. This highlighted the need for a revised set of strategies to address the very significant and immediate impacts of coronavirus across all aspects of life in our city.
6. The strategy set the following principles upon which we will build our response:
  - a. Prioritise the health and wellbeing of our residents, against the immediate threat of coronavirus and the consequences of changes to the way we live. Public Health guidance will be paramount in all the decisions we make.

- b. Support the economic recovery of the City, helping to create a strong, sustainable and inclusive economy for the future. Learning lessons from the challenges of coronavirus, promote a system that utilises the strengths of our city and region to the benefit of all York’s residents and businesses.
- c. Protect and prioritise the City’s environment and reinforce our work to mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- d. Pursue improvements in service delivery where they have been identified as part of the Response phase, creating a more efficient and resilient system.
- e. Reinforce and restore public confidence in the resilience of public agencies and resilience to future challenges and emergencies.

7. Included in June’s report was a One Year Transport and Place Strategy, as the first part of the economic recovery approach. A report in July supplemented this with a Business Support Plan, a Skills and Employment Plan and a Tourism Marketing Plan.

CYC Recovery and Renewal Plan (1 year)				
Economic Recovery Plan			Communities	Corporate
Business Support Plan	One Year Transport and Place Plan	Skills and Employment Plan	Recovery from coronavirus: A community-based approach	Organisational Development Plan
Tourism Marketing Plan				

### Latest Outbreak Update

- 8. Given the continually changing context, an update on the latest situation will be given verbally to the Executive at the meeting.
- 9. The latest official 7 day rate of positive cases of Covid in York is, at 2 May 2021, 17.6 per 100,000 population. This figure is has risen slightly over the last month, although remains lower than the national average and significantly lower than the regional average.
- 10. Given the upcoming milestones in further reduction of restrictions, it is important that everyone follows the relevant guidance to prevent infection.

### Recovery Updates

#### Economic

11. The pandemic has altered how we live and work, and for the majority of employees across the UK, working from home has been a new experience, and many have enjoyed some of the benefits it has to offer; from increased flexibility and autonomy to reduced travel time. Anecdotal evidence from Make it York suggests that the vast majority of employees and company leaders recognise the need for a productive, collaborative space, away from home, to reconnect with colleagues and help build and sustain an inclusive company culture. With the role of the office becoming more important, we expect to see an influx of employees return, as soon as the government permits it. However, only a small proportion of workers are likely to return to the office five days a week.
12. This increased demand for flexibility – in time, place and space, plus the ongoing demand for talent, will mean employers must offer flexible arrangements and diversified workspace if they want to attract and retain the best talent. We have seen this already locally with the reconfiguring of Westminster Place, York Business Park, to a more flexible leasing arrangement and Hiscox moving to use their York premises as a hub for staff returning to the office on a part time basis and continuing to work part of the week remotely. This enables them to recruit from a wider catchment area. Siemens have adopted a similar practice, taking a smaller space to allow staff to work part-time remotely. We expect to see other firms in the city doing the same, embracing a hybrid mix of office and home working.
13. Our own commercial estate is currently close to capacity, with strong demand for small office, studio and workshop space. As larger occupiers look to reduce their office footprint and switch to more flexible arrangements, the existing quantum of business space across the city will be able to accommodate more businesses. York continues to attract plaudits as a great city to live and work in, and we can look towards the post-Covid recovery with some optimism. Office space in York continues to be sought-after, and the range of businesses looking at our city as a potential location continues to expand.
14. One example of this can be seen from the recent announcement from the Department for International Trade that the Bosch subsidiary, ETAS Centre of Excellence for Embedded Software Development (ETAS Ltd) will be expanding in York. ETAS Ltd specialise in solutions to develop embedded systems for the automotive industry. The newly expanded centre will develop the middleware to support future generations of advanced autonomous and highly automated driving. The £1.6 million investment and expansion will bring 11 new high skilled jobs in the autonomous vehicle industry, in addition to a significant supply chain impact for automotive software and future potential to increase to more than 40 positions.

15. Our forthcoming engagement (due to commence in late May) with businesses to inform the development of a new Economic Strategy and Skills Plan for York will seek to deepen our understanding of businesses' changing requirements for workspace as a result of pandemic, providing the Council with an enhanced understanding of the demand for office space in York.

## **People**

16. The Council is providing additional free meals support during the May school holidays and help with food and utility bills, funded from York's COVID Local Support Grant. £50,000 of the £98,000 funding will go towards providing free lunchtime meals over the May half term holiday for children and young people who receive free school meals, in the same way families were supported during the Christmas, February half term and Easter holidays.

17. An additional £100,000 of COVID Outbreak Management Funding will be used to support people with vulnerabilities and residents from minority backgrounds. The funding will also be used to provide extra support to new claimants and families, with or without children, with their food and utility bills until the 20 June cut-off date.

## **Corporate**

18. Recognising the potential for staff to begin to return to office-based working over the coming months, the council is looking at how this can be done safely and efficiently, whilst retaining benefits of flexible working where it makes sense to do so.

19. At this point, the council is not anticipating a dramatic change to the current working arrangements from 21 June, but will start to enter a phased transition with the development of a new office and home working model which will see the gradual return of our staff.

20. What the office will look like will be led by Government guidance, where some of this detail is still unclear. These changes will have an impact on how and when staff use the office, facilities and the ICT equipment needed. All of these points are being considered as plans are put in place.

21. Initially, it is envisaged that the transition will take place over three phases:

- a. Phase 1 - June to September - from 21 June, there will be a gradual return to office working to test out some of the hybrid technologies being used.

- b. Phase 2 - September onwards - The second phase from September will see a more formal office working with staff in offices two days a week. This will allow further testing of hybrid arrangements and new working styles.
- c. Phase 3 - (TBC) - The third phase, with no timescale as yet, will determine the Council's long term working style, which will be influenced from feedback and experience in the first two phases. It is however, envisaged at this stage that the long term working style will be broadly two to three days per week working from the office (with flexibility), but this will be determined in due course based on experiences of the first two phases, as well as public health advice.

22. The transition periods will also mean all staff have the opportunity to receive both doses of the Covid vaccination, to be re-inducted into the building and made fully aware of evolving safety and hygiene measures, creating a smooth and safe transition back to the workplace.

23. The safety of staff and residents will remain paramount in the decisions taken.

24. At the end of April, the High Court dismissed a challenge which would have allowed Councils to continue to hold meetings virtually. The conclusion was that parliament should determine this particular element of policy rather than the courts. This means that, from 6 May 2021, public council meetings must be held in person. The council is currently considering how this can be done in a Covid-safe way. The Government is also consulting on this, with the potential to legislate in future, should they decide it of benefit to permit virtual meetings in future.

## Council Plan

25. The Recovery and Renewal Strategy outlines activities for the next year to allow the continued achievement of Council Plan outcomes.

## Implications

- **Financial** – Within the body of the report.
- **Human Resources** – No specific impacts identified.
- **One Planet Council / Equalities** – A principle of recovery is to ensure climate change is considered in decisions taken. The economic recovery plans recognise and respond to the unequal impact of coronavirus and the risk of increasing levels of inequality as a result.
- **Legal** – No specific impacts identified.
- **Crime and Disorder** – No specific impacts identified.

- **Information Technology** – No specific impacts identified.

## Risk Management

26. There remain significant areas of risk in responding to this crisis across all areas of recovery. The highest priority continues to be the health and wellbeing of residents and all planning and decisions will be taken with this in mind.

## Contact Details

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Report Approved  Date

**Wards Affected:** List wards or tick box to indicate all

All

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

## Annexes

### Background Reports

Update on Coronavirus Response – 7 May 2020

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s139955/Coronavirus%20Executive%20Report.pdf>

City of York Council Recovery and Renewal Strategy - June

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieIssueDetails.aspx?IId=59688&PlanId=0&Opt=3#AI55501>

CYC Recovery and Renewal Strategy Update – July

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/mglIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=59899>

CYC Recovery and Renewal Strategy update - August

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ielIssueDetails.aspx?IId=60167&PlanId=0&Opt=3#AI55914>

CYC Recovery and Renewal Strategy update – September

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s142400/Recovery%20and%20Renewal%20Update%20Report.pdf>

CYC Recovery and Renewal Strategy update – October

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ielIssueDetails.aspx?IId=60724&PlanId=0&Opt=3#AI56530>

City of York Council Recovery and Renewal Strategy - November Update

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s144127/Recovery%20and%20Renewal%20Update%20-%20November%202020%20v0.3.pdf>

City of York Council Recovery and Renewal Strategy – December update

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ielIssueDetails.aspx?IId=61412&PlanId=0&Opt=3#AI57153>

City of York Council Recovery and Renewal Strategy –January Update

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ielIssueDetails.aspx?IId=61755&PlanId=0&Opt=3#AI57489>

City of York Council Recovery and Renewal Strategy –February Update

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s146708/Recovery%20and%20Renewal%20Update%20-%20February%202021.pdf>

City of York Council Recovery and Renewal Strategy –March Update

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ielIssueDetails.aspx?IId=61990&PlanId=0&Opt=3#AI57770>

City of York Council Recovery and Renewal Strategy –April Update

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ielIssueDetails.aspx?IId=62864&PlanId=0&Opt=3#AI58384>