

## **CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MATERIAL WHICH CAN BE USED AS THE BASIS FOR FORMULATING LINES OF QUESTIONING TO ENSURE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE COUNCIL IN DEALING WITH THE PANDEMIC AND THE SUBSEQUENT RECOVERY PLANNING**

### **LGA - A councillor's workbook on the role of leaders and cabinet members during the COVID-19 pandemic**

<https://www.local.gov.uk/covid-19-leadership-workbook-cabinet-members>

- exploring the key issues facing local councils and councillors in organising their ongoing response and working with partners
- reviewing how local councils have responded to the COVID-19 emergency and its far-reaching impact on all aspects of local government
- considering the purpose and functioning of the cabinet and individual cabinet members in response to COVID-19
- examining changes to governance arrangements, decision-making and meetings
- exploring developments in community leadership and community resilience
- recognising the very 'personal' side of COVID-19 and how councillors look after themselves and others during the initial emergency and beyond.
- What are the key challenges that your council has faced in addressing COVID-19?
- When implementing widespread change find a way to capture these unintended consequences.
  - Ask members and volunteers to identify and to report back unexpected results.
  - Ask frontline workers in the same way.
  - Use corporate teams, processes and cabinet meetings to identify unexpected impacts in related services.
- What recovery plans and processes are in place in your council/portfolio area?
- How flexible are these plans? Have you undertaken horizon scanning, taking into account different possible futures? For example, an extended post-peak stage with recurrent waves of disease activity?
- Which elements of the COVID-19 local council response do you want to plan to retain post pandemic? How?
- What has been learned through this crisis that might be used as a transformational opportunity for the better into the future?

## **LGA Emergency response structures during the COVID-19 pandemic**

### **Councillor guidance**

<https://www.local.gov.uk/councillor-guidance-emergency-response-structures>

Examples of what councils, LRF partners, officers and elected members can collectively do to support the emergency response and planning for longer term recovery include:

#### **Keeping elected members informed and engaged in the emergency response**

- Establishing clear processes for council Cabinets (or equivalents) to ‘meet’ and make decisions that can help instruct council officers in their work on the response, including clarity about how decisions are captured and communicated. Alongside approaches to formal meetings, there will also be a need for proportionate processes for less formal dialogue.
- Ensuring this process is transparent and visible to all elected members.
- Implementing clear communication channels across all elected members.
- Providing regular briefings on the work of the SCG so that elected members and others are kept informed.

#### **Engaging elected members in discussions about recovery and lessons learnt**

- As areas being to look beyond the immediate response, agreeing the role councillors can play as councils and wider LRFs plan for a future relaxation of the lockdown and longer-term recovery.
- Ensuring political input into organisational debriefs and lessons learnt at the appropriate time.

## **LGA Key questions and issues for finance portfolio holders during the COVID-19 pandemic**

<https://www.local.gov.uk/key-questions-and-issues-finance-portfolio-holders-during-covid-19-pandemic>

#### **Questions relating to the immediate financial situation**

##### **Key questions**

- What is the overall impact of the pandemic on the council’s current financial position and its ability to deliver the 2020/21 approved revenue and capital budgets?
- What financial support will be available to local councils from central government?
- How will the crisis affect the council’s financial resilience?

#### **Questions relating to the MTFS and longer-term financial resilience**

- How is the crisis affecting the local economy?

- How will the immediate crisis and its aftermath affect the assumptions made in the MTFS?
- What is the future of local government funding in the medium term?
- How will the council's role in leading and supporting the local community be shaped by the crisis and how will this affect priorities and plans?
- The reason the decision needs to be taken;
- impact of the decision on the people who ordinarily use the service;

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### **Questions relating to the MTFS and longer-term financial resilience**

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- How will the council's role in leading and supporting the local community be shaped by the crisis and how will this affect priorities and plans?
- The far-reaching changes to local government services and organisation will throw up 'unintended consequences'. These are unforeseen results of change and innovation. They may be positive or negative, but they need to be identified and may require a response. For example, the low percentages of vulnerable children attending school was not predicted but raises a significant safeguarding issue. When implementing widespread change find a way to capture these consequences.
  - Ask members and volunteers to identify and to report back unexpected results.
  - Ask frontline workers in the same way.
  - Use corporate teams, processes and cabinet meetings to identify unexpected impacts in related services
- What are the key challenges that your council has faced in addressing COVID?
- What is the key challenge that you face in your leadership role?
- What recovery plans and processes are in place in your council/portfolio?
- How flexible are these plans?
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- Have you undertaken horizon scanning taking into account different possible futures for example an extended post peak stage with recurrent waves of disease activity?
- Which elements of the covid 19 local council response do you want to plan to retain post pandemic and how?
- What have you already learnt and implemented during the covid 19 emergency?

### **Review officer delegations to allow swifter decision making**

- create formal and informal virtual cabinet meetings every two weeks to take key political decisions and provide a framework work for wider discussion
- provide a facility for opposition group leaders to comment on cabinet agendas before decisions take place

### **Five key finance questions for cabinet members**

1. What is the current financial position against the 2020/21 budget for the council and my specific service area?
2. How is the budgetary position moving as the crisis continues?
3. How quickly are services likely to be able to recover once lockdown is eased? What will a new normal look like and what is the financial effect?
4. What is the effect of the crisis on the council's medium-term financial strategy?
5. What has been learned through this crisis that might be used as a transformational opportunity for the better into the future?

### **COVID-19:**

1. In recovery planning considering how priorities need to be re-shaped for the portfolio area
2. Contributing to re-shaping whole council priorities and re-shaping medium term financial strategy in the recovery stage

### Leading change and innovation

#### **COVID-19:**

1. Ensuring necessary urgent changes are made quickly and effectively in the pandemic stage
2. Supporting the development of appropriate change and innovation approaches for recovery during the post-peak and recovery stages

### Communicating your message

#### **COVID-19:**

1. Being an 'active communicator' during the emergency, using a range of methods
2. Using political narratives and sense-making approaches to reassure audiences

## Effective decision-making

### **COVID-19:**

- 1 Supporting emergency decision-making processes
- 2 Keeping informed and aware of the decisions being made which affect your portfolio

## Performance monitoring and making a difference

### **COVID-19:**

- 1 Monitoring and reviewing changing performance data during the pandemic stage
- 2 Applying political influence to address blockages or poor performance

## Effective partnerships and systems leadership

### **COVID-19:**

- 1 Using wide network of trusted relationships to ensure effective collaboration
- 2 Addressing blockages in partnership working

## Governance and Accountability

Be visibly accountable and answerable for portfolio

- Support and develop good governance for portfolio areas
- Respecting, valuing and responding to overview & scrutiny effectively

### **COVID-19:**

- 1 Supporting the development of re-modelled decision-making structures such as virtual formal cabinets, annual councils, overview and scrutiny and quasi-judicial meetings
- 2 Ensure there is a good audit trail of actions and decisions made in your portfolio area during the emergency

The Centre for Public Scrutiny has produced the following on-line guides

- **Guide 1: behaviour and etiquette for remote meetings**
- **Guide 2: scrutiny**
- **Guide 3: councillors access to information**
- **Guide 4: councils' support to vulnerable people**
- **Guide 5: councils finances, scrutiny and audit**

Additionally, the following lines of enquiry have been highlighted by the CfPS :-

<https://www.cfps.org.uk/where-do-we-go-from-here-reflecting-and-learning-from-this-experience/>

### **Where do we go from here? Reflecting and learning from this experience**

We want to learn lessons from what has happened and think about what the relationship tells us about:

- The relationship between councillors and the councils of which they are part. Were councillors an integral part of the emergency response? If not, why not? What lessons about councillors' roles can we learn from this?
- The relationship between councillors and officers. Did officers keep councillors informed – and involved – as the crisis progressed? Alternatively, and worryingly, did councillors not actively involved in executive decision-making feel cut adrift?
- The relationship between officers, and the work that we do together. Staff were deployed and had to work in different ways, often at short notice, to meet critical local need. Did this “pulling together” help to build a positive organisational culture? Did staff having to work in different ways feel supported – particularly those who also had to juggle childcare, other caring responsibilities and working from home in an environment which might not have been ideal?
- How was the public kept informed and involved during this period, did the crisis drive more transparency and openness through communications in the immediate response stage, the co-ordination of community resources and the shift to online governance.

<https://www.cfps.org.uk/reviewing-governance-reviewing-the-constitution/>

### **Reviewing governance, reviewing the constitution**

- Who made decisions, and on what, during the pandemic?
- What use did we make of emergency powers – either in the constitution or in statute?
- How did we balance the need for swift decision-making with the need for transparency and accountability?
- How did we manage and balance member and officer roles?