

Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	2 November 2022
Title:	Recovery and Stabilisation Programme
Report of:	Robert Cottrill, Chief Executive
Cabinet member:	Councillor David Tutt, Leader of the Council
Ward(s):	All
Purpose of report:	To update on the progress of the Recovery and Stabilisation Programme
Decision type:	Non key
Officer recommendation(s):	Note the progress made with the Recovery and Stabilisation Programme
Reasons for recommendations:	The Recovery and Stabilisation programme provides a structured and accountable approach for delivering the level of significant organisational change needed to respond to current and future challenges.
Contact Officer(s):	Name: Jo Harper Post title: Head of Business Planning and Performance E-mail: jo.harper@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk Telephone number: 07925 893201

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Recovery and Stabilisation (R&S) programme has now been running for two years and has been highly effective in achieving organisational improvement whilst managing the challenging budget pressures created by the Covid pandemic and subsequent impact on the economy. This report provides an update on recent progress.

2 Achievements

- 2.1 The R&S programme is made up of 5 pillars; covering workplace changes, digital transformation, reshaping delivery, assets and the assurance review. A sixth pillar, relating to restart activities following Covid, has now completed its work. This report sets out key achievements against each of the 5 pillars.

Workplace

- 2.2 As staff are now used to working both at home and in different office locations, as suits their job role, work has been undertaken in collaboration and

consultation with staff and management groups to repurpose the council's office space in Eastbourne to meet future needs. From the start of October 2022, additional working, meeting and collaboration spaces were made available to staff in the Town Hall and the Point (on the Devonshire Park complex). Discussions about further and different working needs will continue and, if necessary, additional arrangements will be implemented. Through the SPACES partnership – Strategic Property Asset Collaboration East Sussex – a reciprocal arrangement with East Sussex County Council is being explored that will enable staff from each organisation to work in designated spaces in the other organisation's building. This would enhance the office arrangements available to staff and teams to work together.

Digital Transformation

- 2.3 Since last reporting in July 2022, the council's next generation chat bot has continued to embed on the website and deliver well – at the time of writing this report, the bot had successfully responded to 40,000 customer queries, 25% of which had been responded to out of office hours. In early October, the bot was launched on parts of the council's customer facing phone lines with the intention that it would deflect the calls that are incorrectly made to the council (eg. calls which should be directed to East Sussex County Council). With the bot responding to these calls, staff in the contact centre will be freed up to respond to those customers with the greatest need. Performance statistics for the phone bot will be shared as they become available.
- 2.4 Projects to implement new, single systems with Lewes District Council for revenues and benefits, and environmental health and licensing activities are in the implementation phase. Current plans are working towards a go live date for both projects in 2023.
- 2.5 A new project will commence as soon as a dedicated resource can be identified to procure and implement a new, single planning system with Lewes District Council.
- 2.6 The Digital Democracy project is exploring ways in which council meetings can be livestreamed. The project team is working to refine the technology and kit to better support public meetings – this will progress as soon as the necessary kit can be procured.
- 2.7 As the council's website was launched 5 years ago, a project is launching to explore the latest technology to support better online delivery of services to and engagement with customers. The timeline to replace the website will be confirmed once resources to lead the activity are appointed.

Reshaping Delivery

- 2.8 The significant work that was undertaken in 2021/22 to reshape services has been embedded during 2022/23 to ensure staff are confident and delivering in their amended roles. There are no further significant reshaping activities planned in the current financial year, but the programme is continuing to look where further efficiencies can be achieved through reshaping.

Assets

- 2.9 There was a clear recommendation from the Assurance Review that the council establish a document setting out the council's assets for disposal consideration. This was set up in January 2021 and is now regularly updated and reviewed. A capital strategy board has also been established to ensure the council's capital programme is subject to robust project and programme management in all areas.

Assurance Review

- 2.10 Further to the actions mentioned above, the council has continued to progress all the recommendations set out in the Assurance Review. Government has been made aware of the council's progress. To ensure all areas have been fully embedded on an ongoing basis, a further internal investigation of the council's response will be undertaken during the winter and will be further reported to Cabinet early in 2023.

3 Priority Based Budgeting

- 3.1 The aim of the R&S programme is to bring about financial stability whilst investing in organisational change and improvement. In order to do this, Priority Based Budgeting (PBB) has been a key component of the programme. Through PBB the council has successfully managed an extensive programme of efficiencies which have been critical in enabling a balanced budget to be maintained through what has been a challenging period for the council.
- 3.2 Following the capitalisation direction from central government in early 2021 in response to the extreme financial pressures being experienced, and the subsequent external Assurance Review being undertaken in the summer of 2021 and the resulting report being published in December, Cabinet agreed in February 2022 that the process of monitoring progress of the external Assurance Review will be undertaken as part of the R&S activity. This approach has worked well and will continue.
- 3.3 It has been helpful, during this challenging period, to undertake a separate PBB process. It is proposed, however, given the positive direction of travel and the track record the council is now showing in managing its financial performance, that future activities relating to the achievement of further efficiencies will be managed within the usual annual budget cycle.

4 Outcome expected and performance management

- 4.1 The R&S programme continues to be overseen by the R&S Member Board which meets on a quarterly basis, as well as regular reports being presented to the Cabinet.

5 Consultation

- 5.1 Staff continue to be regularly informed of the progress of the R&S workstreams and consultation is undertaken where appropriate.

6 Corporate plan and council policies

- 6.1 This report is line with the refreshed Corporate Plan which was updated in May 2022 to bring a stronger emphasis on R&S.

7 Business case and alternative option(s) considered

- 7.1 As set out in the report

8 Financial appraisal

- 8.1 The Recovery and Stabilisation savings targets have been incorporated into departmental budgets for 2022/23 and are therefore subject to regular monitoring as part of usual financial reporting. However, these targets will also continue to be monitored in more detail as part of the Recovery and Stabilisation Member Board meetings. Future savings requirements will be subject to clarification of the national picture, once known.

9 Legal implications

- 9.1 Legal advice has been taken, and will continue to be taken, in respect of specific actions arising from the assurance review and to support the activities of the R&S programme.

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10 Risk management implications

- 10.1 The risks within R&S are regularly assessed and managed as part of the programme/project management activities. The identification and management of any significant risks in relation to the programme will be reported, along with mitigation plans to address them.

11 Equality analysis

- 11.1 An Equality & Fairness Analysis has been undertaken on the R&S proposals. The outcome of this was reported to Cabinet in 2021. Screening of the additional proposals did not find any further risk of adverse impact on groups with protected characteristics

12 Environmental sustainability implications

- 12.1 The proposals in this report do not adversely impact on the council's long-term carbon reduction aims, as set out in the EBC Climate Emergency Strategy.

13 Appendices

- None

14 Background papers

The background papers used in compiling this report were as follows:

- None