

Dear Councillor

CABINET - WEDNESDAY, 9TH SEPTEMBER, 2020

Attached is a copy of the full version of the Wolverhampton Council Citizens' Panel post Covid Recovery Priorities – Key Findings report associated with the following report that will be considered at the meeting of Cabinet on Wednesday, 9th September, 2020.

Agenda No Item

- 5 **Relighting Our City: City of Wolverhampton Council Recovery Commitment (Pages 3 - 14)**
[To approve the Relighting Our City framework which outlines the Council's commitment to support the city to reset, recover and relight from the Coronavirus pandemic]

If you have any queries about this meeting, please contact the democratic support team:

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September 2020

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City of Wolverhampton Council

Citizens' Panel on post-Covid recovery priorities

Key findings

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Agenda Item No: 5

02 Executive summary

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•Key findings: impact of Covid-19

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1

The impacts of Covid-19 on residents are hugely varied, with many describing both financial and emotional effects. **No matter how they've been impacted as individuals, all feel high levels of concern about their community and the wider city**; the city was seen to be facing challenges even prior to the crisis, which many feel will now be exacerbated.

2

Spontaneously, concern is greatest for the unemployed, the young and the vulnerable (defined either as those facing financial distress or those who are more at risk from the virus). Residents worry about the ability of the unemployed to retrain, the long term prospects of the young, and the mental health impacts on the vulnerable. **It should be noted that mental health is a widespread concern that residents feel will impact many in the community**, not just the most vulnerable.

3

Residents do take comfort from the community spirit they feel they have seen in the city during the crisis. For many this confirms their sense of pride in where they are from and their sense of connection to the wider Wolverhampton community.

4

The Council is seen to have responded well to the crisis. The Council is seen to have become more visible at this time, with many noting that they have received clear communications from the Council during the crisis. Going forward, they see opportunities for the Council to offer more efficient online services, but warn the vulnerable must be protected.

•Key findings: responses to recovery plan

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1

The recovery plan is welcomed by residents. It is seen to address the issues they care most about, and provide a constructive path forward. In particular, residents support the positive vision the plan puts forward of ‘building back better’, which resonates with desire for the crisis to result in something positive.

2

Residents did not identify any major gaps in the recovery plan. The five themes are all seen as important, with residents stressing that they are interlinked. Overall, supporting people who need it most and generating more jobs and learning opportunities are felt to be most important. However, residents also feel mental health and emotional support need to be made more widely available.

3

The biggest concern residents have about the plan is whether the city has the resources or powers to deliver it (i.e. recovery determined by decisions at a national level and broader economic challenges). As a result, residents who are more sceptical about the Council and wider Government tend to feel more negatively towards the plan. Optimism generally increased as more ideas were generated during the course of the sessions.

4

The city’s community spirit is seen to be a key strength it can draw on in the recovery. Residents feel this has come across strongly during the crisis and could be harnessed in the recovery. In addition, residents feel that ‘unused’ space in the city, and a strong voluntary sector were key strengths that would aid recovery.

•When thinking about what’s important to them in the recovery, residents came up with the following principles

1

Be fair and inclusive

2

Be transparent and encourage joined-up planning and communication

3

Learn from and collaborate with other regions

4

Be flexible and iterate

5

Achieve a balance between addressing financial and emotional impacts

6

Be ambitious and aim to make the city better than it was before

- **The range of people affected by the crisis means residents feel it is important the plan considers different people's priorities**

- Residents felt that the recovery should leave no-one behind. In particular, they were concerned that vulnerable people are looked after and that people aren't digitally excluded
- In practice this might mean those drafting the plan need to reach out to groups of people who could fall through the cracks such as the homeless/those in insecure housing
- If needed, it was felt there could be a 'triage' system to provide support to those in greatest need, considering in particular financial and health circumstances

"Everybody should be seen and heard – if you can't see someone in person, if you have Zoom, you keep a connection. You need to keep a connection so no one falls through the gaps."

- **This was seen as important as a way of continuing to involve residents in recovery planning, and encouraging collaboration between different parties in the city**
- Residents thought that plans for the recovery should be shown to the public to enable their input
- It was felt that activity related to the recovery should be widely communicated so that resources were used by residents
- And that local businesses and other organisations in the city should be encouraged to communicate with one another to better understand different needs for the recovery, and think creatively about how to resolve them

“We think it’s important that the recovery improves how people are communicating, that it gets people engaged and talking with each other.”

- **Residents were inspired by recovery activities from other regions, and found it reassuring to think that Wolverhampton wasn't on it's own in trying to address challenges.**
- Other regions were thought to be developing interesting ideas for recovery.
 - Residents felt the city could learn from these, including what ideas have worked better or worse
- There were also comments that the recovery could involve partnerships with other parts of the Black Country, West Midlands, or even more nationally-oriented organisations.
 - This was seen as being mutually beneficial for different regions, but also a way of addressing wider economic and social issues outside of the city's control

“Collaborating with other councils and local businesses is important, what other councils are doing, there are some really good ideas.”

- **Whilst short-term measures were seen as important, residents wanted the plan to provide a vision for the future of the city that extended beyond addressing immediate challenges**
- This principle was seen as important due to the potential for a ‘second wave’ of the virus, which might necessitate a ‘plan B’
- Residents also felt that the unprecedented nature of the crisis means that new, innovative solutions are needed, which may require iteration over time

“Everything we’ve been through should be taken forward for the future. Lessons for the future and not to be forgotten.”

- **The impact on employment and the economy are front-of-mind but addressing the hidden emotional impact of the crisis was seen as very important too.**
- Many felt the recovery plan itself should be designed with an understanding of what the economic impact of different activities would be, and should give specific details on what the financial implications of its activities would be
- However, others emphasised that the crisis has been a kind of trauma and that addressing the emotional impacts, which may be more hidden, should also be a priority

“I want to see plans that are a bit more detailed, a bit more specific, a bit more organised, then you have something.”

“If it was up to me, [...] fix the economy first.”

- **This was a widely supported principle, reflecting the feeling that the city shouldn't just 'go back to normal' after the crisis**

- It was felt the recovery plan was an opportunity to make the community of Wolverhampton stronger than it had been before the crisis, maintaining the spirit of looking after neighbours that residents had become used to
- It was also hoped that in the long-term it could help regenerate Wolverhampton as an area and improve social and financial issues

"It's not about returning to normal, but even better than normal."

"We want to say we were here, we came, we saw, we conquered, we made things better for the future."

Thank you

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