

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Cabinet	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	22 July 2020	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 3214
TITLE:	Update on Corporate Strategy Progress and Issues	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report:		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 This report updates the cabinet on progress made in delivering our corporate strategy and identifies key issues for its further development in the context of recovery and renewal following from our response to Covid-19.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to:

- 2.1 Note the impacts of the Council's Covid-19 response and recovery on the delivery of its Corporate Strategy, including opportunities to bring forward delivery where appropriate
- 2.2 Adopt the key actions this year set out in Appendix 1, designed to deliver key Corporate Strategy commitments
- 2.3 Note the case studies attached in Appendix 2, which set out how delivery of the Strategy has been "kickstarted" during this period and will be built upon

3 THE REPORT

- 3.1 Full Council adopted a new four-year Corporate Strategy at its meeting on 25th February. The document set a new direction for the Council, reflecting the aims of

the administration elected in May 2019 and providing a clear approach to the Council's activities and priorities.

3.2 The Corporate Strategy is the Council's overarching strategic plan. It sets out what we plan to do, how we plan to do it, and how we will measure performance over the next four years. It contains a new framework for what we will focus on and how we will work, as follows:

- 1) We have one overriding purpose – **to improve people's lives**. This brings together everything we do, from cleaning the streets to caring for our older people. It is the foundation for our strategy, and we will ensure that it drives our commitments, spending and service delivery.
- 2) We have two core policies – **tackling the climate and nature emergency** and **giving people a bigger say**. These will shape our work.
- 3) To translate our purpose into commitments, we have identified three principles. We want to **prepare for the future, deliver for residents** and **focus on prevention**. These, in turn, help us to identify specific delivery commitments across our services.

3.3 At the same meeting, Council also adopted:

- A first-year **Corporate Delivery Programme (CDP)**, which sets out the detailed actions that Council service areas will be taking in 2020/21 to deliver the strategy; Appendix 1 to this report highlights some of the key commitments identified in the **CDP** for delivery in 2020/21 and where it is expected that that these commitments will continue to be delivered, however this may be in a different form as part of the renewal and recovery work; and
- A **Budget for 2020/21** and Financial Outlook report, which sets out how the strategy will be resourced

3.4 In doing this, the Council ensured it has in place a clear and comprehensive strategy for the organisation, alongside robust financial, resourcing and performance frameworks to secure delivery of its programme.

3.5 Within weeks of adopting this framework, the Council's activities were refocused on the crisis response to Covid-19. The authority's work on this has been set out in detail in the report presented in May and June to Cabinet, Corporate PDS Panel and Council. As described in the report, the Council reacted swiftly to ensure key services were continued and to protect the most vulnerable through initiatives such as the cross-partner Compassionate Communities Hub. Staff were redeployed, a number of projects put on hold and some services reduced temporarily. Some facilities, including libraries and the Roman Baths Museum, were closed as a result of the national restrictions brought in to address the pandemic. In addition, the Council changed the way it delivered services through increased working from home and innovations including more online delivery.

3.6 The Council has also had to deal with the enormous financial impacts of Covid-19, particularly the loss of income from heritage attractions and car parking as a result of the lockdown, and the wider economic impacts of Covid-19 on tourism and the visitor and retail economy. Again, a detailed report setting out the Council's response to the financial impacts was presented to Cabinet on 2nd July. The report highlighted the need to take immediate action to ensure a balanced budget in this year, deferring schemes where possible and seeking savings from staff vacancies and further efficiencies.

3.7 Given the decisive action that has now been taken both in response to the crisis and to stabilise the Council's finances, and as restrictions gradually ease, there is now an opportunity to assess the overall impact on the strategy which the Council adopted in February.

3.8 Inevitably, the level of response required for Covid-19 and the need to focus on reopening our High Streets safely and recovering from the crisis has led to the deferral or delay of some commitments set out in the Corporate Strategy. However, the overall approach set out in the strategy, particularly the Council's key role in improving people's lives and the need for long-term thinking to tackle climate change, have become even more vital.

3.9 The Council has therefore established three external workstreams which focus the Corporate Strategy through the lens of our local Covid-19 experience. These are:

- ✓ **Reopening** - ensuring that our High Streets, shops, hospitality and services are brought back as quickly and above all as safely as possible
- ✓ **Renewal** - ensuring that we take any opportunities created by the "new normal" to address the long-term issues facing the area including tackling the climate emergency and diversifying the economy
- ✓ **Resilience** - ensuring that we build on the success of the Compassionate Communities Hub and work even more closely with partners, our third sector organisations and local volunteers to grow local capacity.

3.10 The situation changes almost daily however it is becoming possible to identify some of the striking changes brought about by Covid-19, both locally, nationally and internationally. While there is uncertainty about the extent of the impacts and to what extent changes brought about during the crisis will be permanent, the table below sets out some of the key issues that need to be considered alongside their impacts on the Council's strategy.

Corporate Strategy	Key Issues and Impacts
<p>Tackling the climate and nature emergency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of the crisis has brought into sharp relief the dependency of our area on an economic model based on mass tourism and the need to diversify into low carbon, locally based, green economic

Corporate Strategy	Key Issues and Impacts
	<p>recovery models.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tackling the climate emergency will come into even sharper focus as the Council works with partners to renew the local economy and address the long-term challenges facing our area, such as tackling inequalities and reshaping our skills base. Key commitments in the strategy relating to the climate emergency- such as investment in retrofitting homes to improve energy efficiency, renewable energy development and sustainable travel- have become even more relevant, as they form key elements of investment packages being identified to boost the economy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Giving people a bigger say 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lockdown combined with the swift adoption of new technology have sped up the introduction of online and video engagement tools. Council meetings are now livestreamed, and the Council Leader has established regular webinars on key topics. Our weekly e-newsletter now goes to than 50,000 email addresses. A webinar organised by the Council on Reopening Our High Streets Safely has been watched by more than 700 people. Our two most recent webinars focus on the key issues for young people from Covid 19 and lockdown, and on the green recovery. We have also used webinars to explore the legacy of slavery in our area as well as to engage with local residents on our local response to the impact of Covid-19, including the impact on council finances. This emphasis on quick and easy online engagement will be continued and further developed (see case study). It is also important to emphasise the associated support and help required for people who have limited or no access to digital services. We must consider fully the equalities implications of this shift to online working. For example, during the crisis the Council also wrote to all households in the area and worked with key local groups such as parish and town councils and local radio stations.
<p>Delivering for residents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The closure of libraries during lockdown has led to innovation including a “Virtual Library” (see case study) and these digital innovations will likely continue even as our facilities reopen. Support for the most vulnerable has continued

Corporate Strategy	Key Issues and Impacts
	<p>throughout the lockdown period through our One Stop Shops (<i>see case study</i>) and the work of the Compassionate Communities Hub (<i>see case study</i>). The cross-service and partner collaboration that has supported this work will continue and become stronger.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our waste and recycling teams dealt with significant increases in recycling tonnages while maintaining doorstep collection throughout the crisis. Feedback from local communities has been overwhelmingly positive, particularly from children with their rainbow drawings. There is now an opportunity for residents and the Council to work even more closely together to continue the high level of recycling, particularly of food waste, and to keep our streets and open spaces clean.
<p>Preparing for the future</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council’s commitment is to net zero carbon by 2030. Tackling the climate and nature emergency will come into even sharper focus as the council works with business and communities to renew the local economy • To ensure this, partnership working is vital and an Economic Renewal Board has been established that brings together businesses, our Universities, college and the Council to protect local firms while making the changes we need to diversity our economy. • The introduction of social distancing measures in town centres has led to a re-allocation of road space on a temporary basis for walking and cycling, particularly in town centres. This has also provided a catalyst for wider conversations about how the Council can achieve the commitments to reducing traffic on local communities. The Council’s new Liveable Neighbourhoods website has received over 10,000 visits (<i>see case study</i>) and we are progressing key projects including Residents Parking Zones, electric vehicle charging, the “Wiltshire Whippet” and we are also working closely with WECA on Bristol to Bath mass transit.
<p>Focusing on prevention</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The work of the Compassionate Communities Hub (<i>see case study</i>), established in days at the start of the crisis to provide support, is a living example of exactly the “joined up” approach to supporting our most vulnerable highlighted in the Corporate

Corporate Strategy	Key Issues and Impacts
	<p>Strategy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Hub has drawn on pre-existing partnership working with Virgin Care, the CCG and our third sector colleagues including 3SG. • Detailed work is underway for the Hub to evolve still further to support local wellbeing through designing services around all the needs that people have, not working in “silos”, • The Council also took swift and decisive action to accommodate all rough sleepers at the start of the crisis, directly housing 42 individuals (see case study), Last year the Council secured the delivery of 329 units of affordable housing, the highest annual delivery for many years. In addition, there are a further 428 units with planning consent awaiting build-out. • The Council is also looking to further enhance delivery by the direct provision of Council housing, including discounted market housing, housing for rent and supported housing schemes to assist our most vulnerable residents. • A covid-19 Local Outbreak Management Plan has been prepared to prevent or limit future waves of the disease in B&NES • Preventive services of all types have all made imaginative adaptations to working under lockdown. These changes will be reviewed, and some will be continued into the future where they bring greater effectiveness or efficiency.

3.11 In addition, the Council has an **internal recovery workstream**, chaired by the Chief Executive and which is focusing on the following

- To provide strategic leadership for all aspects of the Council’s recovery;
- Develop a new vision for how Council buildings and technology will support services post Covid-19;
- Making the most of our workforce and available technology;
- Ensuring Council services are future focussed, working at optimal efficiency and re-built on principles of good governance.

3.12 The table below outlined the key themes and workstreams and focus of the recovery work

Theme	Description	Specific work includes
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Financial recovery and Future Resilience	Planning in-year financial recovery and delivery of agreed budget mitigations. Reviewing the core cost structure of our business and setting the strategy to plan our resources for the medium to long-term by being future focussed, taking opportunities and diversifying risk to deliver the Council's Corporate Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Recovery plans • Council redesign
Workplaces & Workforce Fit for the Future	Returning Services and our Workforce from a Covid-19 lockdown position to a 'new normal' by reviewing our existing use of assets, designing new workplaces which offer real flexible working arrangements and giving the workforce technology and tools that are fit for the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesigned Council IT systems • Flexible and remote working policies • Redesign of Council buildings
Future Focussed Redesign & Effective Corporate Governance	Ensuring that the organisation is built on sound foundations of good governance, clear lines of corporate control and oversight and we take opportunities to future focus service redesign to deliver optimum efficiency to the business	<p>Specific service reviews include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property Services • Heritage Services • Adult Social care • Centralisation of corporate services

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

The Council has a wide range of powers which allow it to deliver the strategy adopted in February. It should be noted however that the government have introduced an extensive range of new legislation, regulations and guidance during this period, which may influence how certain aspects of our programme are delivered. The Council Strategy was subject to a full Equalities Impact Assessment and it is important that equalities are actively pursued as we implement the strategy.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

5.1 A full report on the Council's approach to financial recovery was presented to cabinet on 2nd July. However, this is a fast-moving situation and updates will be provided as appropriate e.g. relating to government and WECA funding.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision-making risk management guidance.

7 CLIMATE CHANGE

7.1 This report provides an opportunity to re-emphasise the Council's climate emergency commitments and to identify ways of speeding up potential delivery mechanisms in the light of our approach to economic renewal. The rise of home working during lockdown and the emphasis on local needs, particularly for food and other essential shopping, has demonstrated the possibility of, and benefits arising from, new low-carbon ways of working and organising. In addition, the local economy must diversify away from dependency on mass tourism.

7.2 During the lockdown period, the Cabinet member held a number of webinar-based "climate conversations" (see *case study*). Tackling the climate end nature emergency will now be placed at the centre of our renewal vision and a future webinar programme has been established to set out our plans for progressing this.

8 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

8.1 The option of completely redrafting the approach and priorities set out in the Corporate Strategy was considered. However, as set out in the report, it was considered that while there were clearly impacts on the timing of delivery, the overall themes and approach set out in the strategy remained highly relevant.

9 CONSULTATION

9.1 This report has been cleared by the S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer.

Contact person	David Trethewey, Director of Partnerships and Corporate Services
Background papers	Corporate Strategy Financial Plans Covid-19 Response report Financial Recovery report Webinars – Council YouTube Channel
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	

Appendix 1

Delivering the Corporate Strategy in 2020/2021

Portfolio- Leader

Key action this year- continue to develop our series of webinars on key issues for our area, so we are more accountable and transparent and give people a bigger say

Corporate Strategy commitments this delivers-

- new technologies
- tailor our approach to community engagement in Bath
- community engagement charter

Portfolio- Resources and Deputy Leader

Key action this year- manage our finances well to address the income challenges caused by covid 19 and ensure central government shares these burdens fairly

Corporate Strategy commitments this delivers

- new technologies

Portfolio – Adult Services

Key action this year - continue the “no wrong door” model of the Compassionate Communities Hub and work even more closely with our third sector and other partners to support our most vulnerable

Corporate Strategy commitments this delivers

- preventative approaches
- reduce health inequalities
- build on local strengths

Portfolio- Climate Emergency and Neighbourhoods

Key actions this year- engage with our communities on a new vision for our area with climate and nature emergency at its heart - crack down on people who dump rubbish and support those who do the right thing by taking their litter home, and by sorting and recycling their waste (see *case study*)

Corporate Strategy commitments this delivers

- carbon neutral development and energy efficiency retrofitting
- local renewable energy
- reduce waste, increase recycling and support local litter picking schemes
- effective approach to fly-tipping and litter enforcement
- natural environment carbon stores and biodiversity e.g. planting more trees
- Clean Air Zone

Portfolio- Transport Services

Key action this year - continue to deliver improvements to walking and cycling, to build Liveable Neighbourhoods in partnership with local businesses and communities, and deliver key transport projects

Corporate Strategy commitments this delivers

- walking, micro mobility (cycling), car-sharing, buses, and rail;
- Liveable Neighbourhoods (Low traffic)
- Residents Parking Zones
- Electric vehicle charging

Portfolio- Housing, Planning and Economic Development

Key action this year- work with the new Economic Recovery Board to reduce our dependency on mass tourism and build a more sustainable economy by promoting our local centres.

Corporate Strategy commitments this delivers

- high-skill economy
- green local economy

Portfolio- Children's Services

Key action this year – remodelling the Children social care front door and service model to ensure that it is easier to access service provision and referrals (see *case study*)

Corporate Strategy commitments this delivers

- improved statutory health and care services
- develops preventative approaches
- reduce health inequalities
- provision for children and young people with SEND

Portfolio - Community Services

Key action this year – reopen our libraries safely and ensure our key heritage facilities can reopen in a safe and sustainable way

Corporate Strategy commitments this delivers

- Build on local strengths

Appendix 2 - Case Studies

Giving people a bigger say

The imposition of lockdown meant that the council has had to adapt to working in different ways by turning to technology, using online video and engagement tools.

Communicating key messages to residents quickly has been vital and, although not all have computer access, we are able to reach a large proportion of our population through e-communication. At the start of lockdown, we rapidly expanded the reach of our weekly e-connect newsletter to more than 50,000 residents, by combining the email databases held by various services and sharing the newsletter via the Nextdoor website.

To maintain a two-way conversation the council Leader established regular webinars on key topics, streamed live on our YouTube channel. The webinars give residents direct access to local decision makers without the need to travel and 100 people can take part in each discussion. Panellists appear on screen as in a regular zoom call and have the option to illustrate points via slides. Webinar attendees can use the chat and Q&A features at any time and may also be invited to temporarily join the panel to speak during the webinar. As they are interactive the webinars are very flexible, which means issues can be explored as they arise in the discussion.

The webinars have proved very popular for example the Reopening Our High Streets Safely webinar has now been viewed over 700 times and webinars have also been held. Our two most recent webinars focus on the key issues for young people from Covid 19 and lockdown, and on the green recovery. We have also used webinars to explore the legacy of slavery in our area as well as to engage with residents on our local response to the impact of Covid-19, including the impact on council finances.

Following a change in regulations to permit virtual meetings, the council selected Zoom as its platform with public meetings streamed on its YouTube channel. Members of the public can engage with the meetings online by making a statement or asking a question and are given specific instructions on how to do so in the virtual setting.

18 virtual meetings have now been held including three Planning Committees, two Council meetings and three Cabinet meetings. Community meetings, such as the Interagency Forum, are also taking place via zoom and the council is also conducting school appeals virtually.

Being able to virtually attend a meeting from home has proved to be a hit with residents. Viewing figures are growing steadily, the May cabinet meeting has been viewed more than 200 times and the council's last planning meeting has been watched almost 300 times.

By communicating virtually, residents can engage with the council quickly and easily. We will look to develop this method of interaction further whilst ensuring the views of those without access to internet facilities continue to be heard through more traditional methods of communication.

Virtual library

With the closure of public libraries as a result of COVID-19 the libraries team had to work out the best way to engage with customers – the answer was to set up a virtual library using service social media channels.

It took just three days to establish the new library offering, using Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to offer services and share information. Content is regularly monitored and reviewed to ensure it remains fresh and interesting for customers.

A daily theme is assigned for children and adults ranging from digital support to home-schooling ideas and arts and crafts activities. The themes reflect the Universal Offers from Libraries Connected - reading, information & digital, culture & creativity, health & wellbeing and the Children's Promise. Feedback has been extremely positive, with Baby Bounce and Rhyme videos becoming a firm favourite and there has been a big growth in followers.

The service has also made it easier for new users to join online; any B&NES resident can now complete the online registration on the LibrariesWest website and use their membership number to sign into any of the digital services.

To meet increased demand the service invested £3,000 in new e-Audio with a wide range of new titles added to the eBook and Audio collections shared with our LibrariesWest neighbours. In April there was a 100%+ increase in the number of people using both services when compared to the previous April and upward trend is continuing. 81% of existing library card holders have used e-Audio books for the very first-time during lockdown and almost one in five e-Audio book users are brand new library members. eMagazines have also proved popular, in April almost 1,000 members downloaded nearly 7,000 issues from the library service collection of around 100 titles.

The service also launched a virtual Dungeons and Dragons club, a virtual Lego Club and an online book group. Lockdown creative writing and poetry competitions also proved very popular receiving positive feedback:

“I found it very therapeutic to write – it gave me a sense of mental freedom at a time when physical freedom is so restricted.”

“I just also wanted to say thank you for running this competition. It has given me something to focus on while being furloughed and given me the motivation to get back into writing.”

The Home Library Service was a big source of concern at the start of lockdown, as it provides a vital service for many of the readers, offering social contact as well as reading materials. Many of the readers and the volunteers are in the most vulnerable groups, so the service was immediately halted as the team worked to find ways to operate safely. Arrangements have now been made for the volunteers to ring their readers where possible and a pared-down 'drop off' service for books has been established.

One Stop Shops

Despite the lockdown, Bath & North East Somerset Council's One Stop Shop (OSS) in Bath and Library Information and Advice centres in Keynsham and Midsomer Norton have remained open providing vital council services for residents who need support.

All non-essential services provided face-to-face are on hold, but Monday – Friday between 10am and 4pm customers have telephone access to council and partner services, can make payments on self-service machines and access welfare support.

To enable the OSS and Information and Advice Centres to remain open, social distancing measures were quickly put in place. These include:

- encouraging customers to enter the building individually
- erecting barriers to prevent close contact between staff and customers
- widening aisles
- removing furniture and seating
- erecting signs reminding customers to maintain two metre social distancing
- removing stock from customers reach to prevent cross-contamination
- ensuring staff working at computers keep one computer apart from one another and clean computers after use
- ensuring staff access to hand washing facilities, hand sanitiser, gloves and face masks

Staff have risen to the challenge of changing working practices, including:

- working flexibly, including from home on an amended rota
- supporting other council services by for example processing renewals for Diamond Travel cards for the Transport team and taking payments from the contact centre for bulky waste removal.
- supporting the contact centre and handling the switchboard

In April alone, 1290 people visited the One Stop Shop and Information and Advice Centres, and 180 Welfare support Retail Food vouchers were issued to vulnerable people who may well have gone hungry without support.

Children's Services

Children's social care services support more than 1,000 vulnerable young people and care leavers. In the run up to lockdown, the team carried out risk assessments and completely redesigned the service.

The changes impacted more than 100 members of staff. Instead of working in individual teams such as Child Protection or Children in Care, two service wide teams were created to work on a two-week rota- one to carry out visits, the other designated as the duty team.

Social workers continued to work with their allocated families remotely, and home visits were undertaken by the delegated visiting team. Unless there were serious concerns regarding the safeguarding of children, social workers did not enter homes during family visits and instead, to minimise risk, spoke on the doorstep. The approach helped to build trust and some families became more willing to accept help at a time when the whole country was in some kind of need.

Indeed, in some cases the only contact social workers had with families was to play a supporting role, coordinating deliveries of nappies, food and medicines. Consequently, positive relationships have developed with many families now viewing their social worker as less judgemental and more supportive.

The Connecting Families team, including the Bright Start Children Centre, has continued its work with vulnerable families with children under five throughout lockdown. Most staff work from home and home visits are delegated to an on-call team. Staff have provided advice and support for parents, compiled activity packs, delivered food parcels and liaised with other agencies to provide a co-ordinated response.

The COVID-19 lockdown has highlighted the disadvantages facing young people, their families and carers supported by the Youth Offending Service. They have been disproportionately affected by school closures and often have insufficient IT resources to maintain contact with their peers or to access support. Many of these young people have been bored, frustrated and scared and have required emotional health support.

The council's Young People's Prevention Service has continued to respond to the individual needs of these young people and their families either on the phone or through regular doorstep visits or socially distanced meetings in open spaces. The team have worked to engage these young people in practical reparation projects including giving feedback on the new knife crime programme and writing letters to people in care homes. Work in addressing the risk of reoffending has also continued.

In some cases, food parcels and other essential items have been provided. Other young people have been supported to engage in home schooling and a number have been supported to start attending school again.

Liveable Neighbourhoods

With fewer vehicles on the roads during lockdown air quality across Bath and North East Somerset improved and more people took up walking and cycling.

The council wants to maintain this momentum. One of its key aims is to encourage a long-term shift to active travel by encouraging people to walk and cycle more, taking pressure off roads and public transport networks while continuing to support those who depend on their vehicle for mobility.

Following the relaxation of restrictions, some temporary measures have been introduced to widen pavements and remove traffic from roads to enable people to socially distance and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The council now wants to build on this. Two months into lockdown it launched the Liveable Neighbourhoods project. The idea was to use the fresh knowledge gained during the pandemic to consider where additional measures could be implemented to help solve traffic and environmental problems with a modal shift.

Via a dedicated website, residents are being asked for their help in shaping the plans by identifying locations where more space can be created for walking and cycling, accessibility improved, or the impact of traffic reduced.

By the end of June, the site had been visited more than 10,000 times and more than 3000 residents had put forward suggestions to reshape the future of transport in their community.

The consultation will remain open until late summer when the council will identify the priority areas where it will use its limited resources effectively to transform Bath and North East Somerset's streets into places where people choose to walk and cycle. Any ideas that are taken forward will be subject to further public engagement and if new permanent traffic restrictions are identified they will involve a formal consultation process.

The long-term vision is to create a connected district fit for the future, whilst tackling the Climate Emergency.

Climate Emergency

While the council's main focus over the past few months has been responding to the needs of residents and businesses during the COVID-19 crisis, it has not lost sight of its commitment to reduce carbon emissions and achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.

Over the past two months the cabinet member for Climate Emergency, Councillor Sarah Warren, has held a series of conversations with local community members who are involved in activities that contribute towards the carbon neutral aim.

Guests have included:

- Adam Gretton, from More Trees for BANES, who discussed building a community tree nursery
- Donald MacIntyre, from Emoresgate Seeds, who explained how good quality meadows take carbon deep into the soil
- Lorna Montgomery, from Share and Repair Bath, who spoke about the successful, growing community of repairers and fixers helping residents keep stuff for longer and the expansion the Sharing Library
- John Adler, Chair of Freshford Parish Council, who spoke about the role of Parish Council's in being able to take action to reduce carbon emissions at a really local level
- Polly and Elsa France who explained how they got involved in the Youth Climate Strikes, what it means to them to make their voice heard and the discussions that are happening in school as a result
- Ped Asgarian, from the Community Farm in Chew Magna, who discussed the need to change our food culture to reduce the environmental and social impact and benefit the local economy, as well as the opportunities the farm provides for improving mental health & wellbeing.

The discussions, available on the council's YouTube channel have already been viewed more than 200 times.

The ideas discussed will be picked up and built-on during a series of special Green Renewal webinars in the coming weeks.

The council views Green Renewal as fundamental to how it leads the district towards a more resilient future and the webinars will focus on opportunities for tackling the Climate and Nature Emergency with a green economic and community recovery from COVID-19.

Waste Services

With the imposition of lockdown, the council prioritised its kerbside recycling and general waste collections to keep them running normally. Many residents were grateful that the service was not interrupted with staff mentioned in many of the rainbow thank you pictures posted in windows across the district.

The council did have to temporarily suspend bulky and garden waste collections due to staff self-isolating or shielding, but these resumed quickly in mid-April.

Due to health concerns however, the council had to close all its recycling centres. Following a detailed review Keynsham recycling centre reopened at the end of May for essential use only. Access is restricted to four vehicles at a time and users must maintain social distancing. The reopening of the council's other recycling sites, when finances allow, is under review.

An unexpected and frustrating impact of the lifting of lockdown restrictions has been a big increase in the amount of litter left in our parks and open spaces.

Gas canisters, balloons, glass, disposable barbecues, plastic bottles, cans and bags of dog foul have been left strewn on the ground and around overflowing bins, putting extra strain on the council. In May and June alone the council's cleansing team dealt with more than 120 littering incidents.

While the support of volunteers such as the Keynsham Wombles has been invaluable, it is the responsibility of residents and visitors to clear up their rubbish and use a bin or take it home. To try to combat the litter menace the council has now launched an anti-littering campaign with the powerful message 'Don't be a tosser'. The campaign is not intended to cause offence, but the message is hard-hitting. Signs have been erected in parks and open spaces in Keynsham, Saltford and Bath and anyone caught littering can be fined £150.

Business Grants

Since the onset of COVID-19 the council's Business & Skills team operating under the Invest in Bath brand, has been working incredibly hard to give targeted help to companies affected by the pandemic.

Its aim is to help businesses not only survive these challenging times, but to flourish as we move into recovery.

The team has processed close to 4,000 applications for the various grants offered by the government including the Small Business Grant Fund, the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund and the Discretionary Grant scheme for charities and small or micro businesses. More than £30m in grants have now been awarded to local businesses and charities though these schemes and thousands of eligible retail, leisure and hospitality premises across the district have also been awarded business rate discounts.

Invest in Bath has also subsidised a series of free support sessions for businesses covering a range of subjects via individual zoom meetings and webinars. More than 450 businesses in the past quarter have received help with emergency financial planning, business planning, human resources, online training and reopening preparations. An example of the team's success is one local retailer who moved to on-line trading after being given support and turned over £10,000 in sales within a month.

The Invest in Bath team has also compiled a database on its website of essential information to support businesses to safely reopen and renew. This includes:

- the latest guidance on business responsibilities
- information on social distancing, queuing and managing customers
- risk assessments and health and safety
- food safety
- PPE
- travel
- training and redundancy support
- opportunities.

Businesses can also directly contact the team with specific concerns and questions and be signposted to support services.

The Business & Skills Team continues to engage with and support our business sectors most affected by COVID-19, for example by supporting retail centres with their reopening plans, assisting businesses with filling any skills gaps and by providing support for employers who unfortunately need to make redundancies.

The team is working on a number of projects as part of the Renewal Board contributing to all three work packages involved in rebuilding a strong, resilient economy in Bath & North East Somerset.

Compassionate Communities Hub

Bath and North East Somerset is a Compassionate Community in which people are inspired and supported to look after themselves and each other.

With the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic the project has taken on greater significance.

Ahead of lockdown, the council, the CCG and Virgin Care joined forces with local 3rd sector infrastructure organisation 3SG and other local organisations. Working around the clock, they set up the Compassionate Community Hub, based at Peasedown St John, to support people self-isolating, shielding or simply in need of help.

Staff from all the partner organisations were seconded to the Hub to help and were supported by 2,500 volunteers recruited by 3SG. A dedicated phone line was set up for those in need. Staff from Virgin Care provided a triage service, signposting people to a range of support including money advice housing, mental health, emergency food, as well as help from volunteers with shopping and picking up medication.

Since lockdown the Hub has received more than 6,000 calls and the feedback from people supported by the Hub team has been overwhelming:

“Thank you from the bottom of my heart for arranging for the lovely lady to collect my shopping for me whilst I'm self-isolating, her smile made me happy for the rest of the day. You are doing a great job all of you. She packed the bag, just like I would if I had done it myself.”

“Thank you to whoever spoke to my mum today at the Compassionate Community Hub, she is a very proud lady who found herself in a desperate situation. You were very kind and considerate.”

Staff at the Hub have also proactively called people shielding at home to make sure they have access to food and are well. The response has been heart-warming, some who have received calls have not spoken to anyone for some time and are delighted to have someone to talk to.

The strong working partnership at the Compassionate Communities Hub has made a real difference to people's lives and is helping to make neighbourhoods and communities stronger. Although government restrictions are easing the Hub will continue its support throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond.

More Housing Options

As part of the response to the Covid crisis the Council, working with partners, assisted 69 rough sleepers to find housing of which 42 of these were housed directly by the Council in temporary accommodation. This action is already creating a number of positive outcomes for the individuals concerned including reduced drug and alcohol usage and improved mental wellbeing. The Council is committed to ensuring that these positive outcomes are maintained for these individuals but also that there are more high-quality housing options for those residents in need, particularly our more vulnerable residents. As such the Council is progressing a range of strategies designed to support this aim; including:

- **Bespoke Rough Sleeper Action Plan**
The Council has committed to extending the provision of temporary accommodation for rough sleepers for at least the next 6 months. During this time individual housing action plans aim to ensure that all rough sleepers are provided with the support and assistance to enable them to transition into supported or permanent accommodation.
- **Improving Housing Conditions**
Last year the Council extended the Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing requirements to include all shared houses in the City of Bath, regardless of their size. Outside of Bath all larger HMOs are required to be licensed. This has had a significant and positive impact on the housing conditions and management standards in these properties. So far around 2,300 HMOs have been licensed within the district. In addition, the Council has also taken formal action on a number of identified sub-standard properties including issuing 50 formal Warning letters; 6 Cautions; and two Financial Penalties.
- **Preventing Homelessness**
The Council has enhanced its positive work preventing homelessness, particularly improving working with the private rented sector. As a result the Council has maintained its very low usage of temporary accommodation and at the time of writing the rate of temporary accommodation usage was only a tenth of the national average.
- **Social & Council Housing**
Last year the Council secured the delivery of 329 units of affordable housing, the highest annual delivery for many years. In addition, there are a further 428 units with planning consent awaiting build-out. The Council is also looking to further enhance delivery by the direct provision of Council housing, including discounted market housing, housing for rent and supported housing schemes to assist our most vulnerable residents.