

Draft for consideration by SCG

A Recovery Road Map for the Strategic Co-ordinating Group for the Warwickshire and the West Midlands Conurbation

The combined Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) for Warwickshire and the West Midlands conurbation has been in active mode, responding to the ongoing emergency incident of the pandemic, for over 12 months now. SCG, having initially been chaired by senior police colleagues, has most recently been chaired by local government chief executives. It has enjoyed strong, consistent cross-sector support right from the start and the leadership throughout at individual and organisational level has been exemplary.

The arrangements at tactical and operational level have been robust yet flexible as the impacts of the pandemic have peaked and receded over the year. The vulnerable peoples cell and the personal protective equipment (PPE) cell should be highlighted for particularly impactful work in the face of a turbulent and constantly changing national position.

In line with best practice from the Civil Contingencies Act, the Recovery Co-ordinating Group (RCG) was stood-up 6 months ago, jointly chaired by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) chief executive and the chief executive of Walsall Council and despite some excellent background work has not been able to move fully into recovery as the emergency incident remains live.

The combined SCG area has sadly seen thousands of deaths as a result of COVID-19; our acute health services, ambulance services and all public services have been under significant, arguably unparalleled pressure. Our businesses small, medium and large have all faced extreme challenges – for many, existential threats. The strategic aim has been to sustain the most severely impacted sectors and supply chains, in order for them to be able to recover as quickly as possible.

There is no doubt that the emerging evidence is compelling that the structural inequalities in social, health and economic terms that were in play as we entered the pandemic have deepened and widened during the past year. So the responsibility on leadership across the SCG area is to create the enabling conditions for a recovery which addresses this unfairness.

The latest national lockdown and restrictions on movement and gathering have reduced the rate of infection significantly across the region. Whilst numbers remain high, there is now a sense that the focus on local outbreak management plans will ensure that any surge in infections; variants of concern or stubborn, ongoing disease are kept under control.

The roll-out of the national vaccination programme has been very effective, including good aggregate take-up rates across the SCG area. This, alongside the publication of the national road map up to 21 June 2021, means we must now start to cautiously, yet confidently move towards transitioning out of SCG arrangements to LRF business as usual and full operation of the RCG.

The SCG road map illustrates the key milestones, with each pause being considered against the four test criteria as set out by Government and the broader recovery metrics dashboard previously endorsed by the SCG. All partners have their own recovery roadmaps and can usefully use our regional 'pack' to ensure consistency, common strategic intent, whilst respecting local and organisational differences.

There is no such thing as a good pandemic. We have never witnessed such dramatic, adverse impacts on communities, the economy, public institutions, the community/voluntary sector and the financing and machinery of national government. But the Warwickshire and West Midlands SCG, through the rigour of the governance, operational oversight and strong leadership has managed well despite the unique circumstances. None of us can recall a previous emergency incident,

which has required a response enduring well over a year and a recovery that will be so important, yet so challenging.

This SCG will learn fast and openly as we transition out; but will have confidence when the time is right to handover to the established LRF and RCG arrangements to lead a sustainable, fair and inclusive recovery for our people and our places. These arrangements will also include local processes within each LRF for a response to further outbreak management, as we all come to terms with living with Coronavirus, but in the event of further national direction, will also ensure should it be necessary the SCG can be stood back up within the framework of the CCA .

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