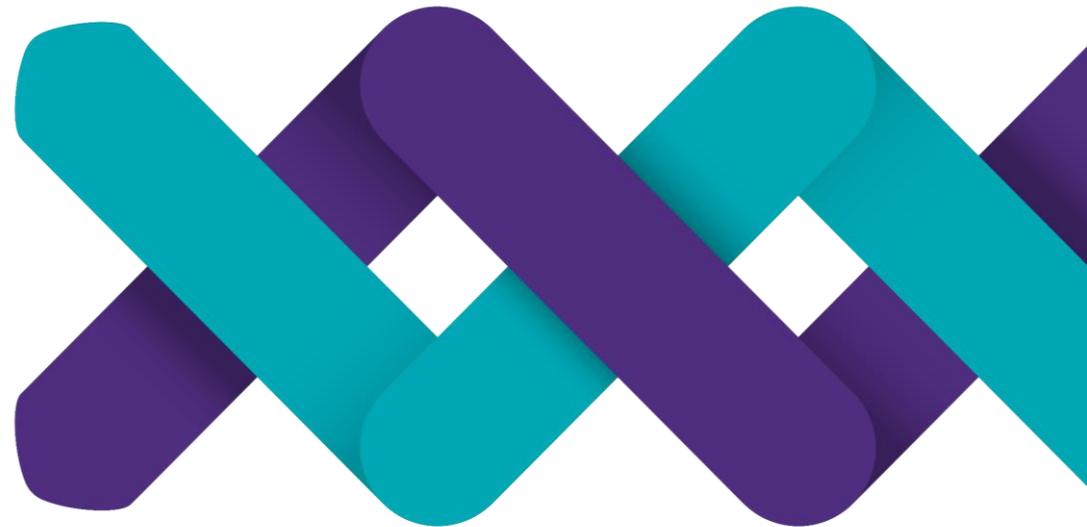


# COVID-19 and local government

Slide content for audit committees

September 2020

**DRAFT**



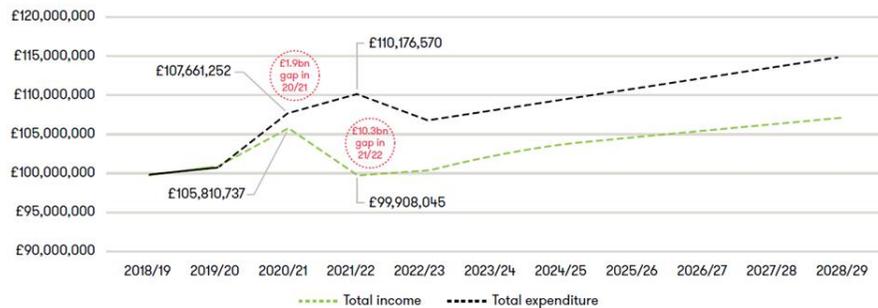
# Covid-19 update

## Where are we now?

Over five months into lockdown and councils have moved from the initial emergency response phase to focus on recovery planning which is running in parallel with on-going responses to the pandemic, such as supporting vulnerable people, and managing the capacity challenges of delivering business as usual alongside Covid-19 response.

The Government has confirmed three tranches of funding to support the impact of increase spend and reduced income directly attributed to Covid-19, and are in the process of confirming further support via the income compensation scheme.

Local Authority Income and Expenditure (England) 2018/19 to 2028/29



Source: Grant Thornton/CIPFA Financial Foresight

Local government finances remain significantly impacted and our Financial Foresight forecast indicates that English local authorities have a funding gap of £1.9bn this financial year, rising to over £10bn in 2021/22. There is significant uncertainty as to whether the Government will provide further Covid-19 related funding, and what the medium-term funding for the sector will be following the Autumn's Comprehensive Spending Review. Our modelling currently assumes that government funding will remain broadly unchanged, with income being affected by ongoing reduction to Council Tax and Business Rates, both in terms of a reduction to these tax bases, alongside reduced payments as a consequence of the recession brought about by the pandemic.

The uncertainty also impacts on future spending pressures and sales, fees and charges income. For example, leisure centres and swimming pools can now be opened, but must follow Government guidelines on issues such as social distancing. Not all leisure services have been able to reopen, and those that have are not able to generate levels of income originally forecast pre-covid. Social care faces uncertainty in relation to future demand, for example most councils responsible for children's services are forecasting an increase in case load when children return to schools in September. For adults, where in some cases demand has fallen during the pandemic, there is uncertainty over future levels of demand. There is also concern over provider failure in relation to social care and other services such as leisure and transport, with many councils providing financial support and loans to some providers, which will not be sustainable in the medium term.

As place leaders, councils are managing the conflict between revitalizing footfall in high streets and keeping people safe, with some leading by example and encouraging council officers to spend some of the week in council offices. Use of public transport as a key mode of travel to get to work remains a particular challenge.

## Lessons learned

All organisations, including councils, have been reflecting on the lessons learned from the pandemic, and are seeking to maintain the positive experiences as well as learn from the challenges, as part of recovery planning. There is a recognition that technology has enabled many people to successfully work remotely, and that this will have a fundamental impact on working patterns well after Covid-19 has passed. Councils are reviewing their property portfolios to understand the changes required in terms of future usage patterns, including how councils interact with their communities, whether parts of the municipal estate should be disposed, and whether alternate use of space can support income generation.

There will be demographic variations between places, meaning there is no "one size fits all" to economic recovery. For example, home to work geographies will vary, with some people who previously commuted into a council area for their work may now be considering office space closer to home, leading to a rise in demand for shared office space in some areas, that will in part counteract the fall in demand elsewhere.

# Covid-19 update (cont'd)

## Lessons Learned (Cont'd)

Many councils have recognized the improvement in community engagement and partnership working with the voluntary sector and other public sector organisations during the pandemic and are seeking to build on this, with a recognition that sharing responsibility for place-based recovery plans can help sustain the improvements gained. Although a shared view of place-based recovery takes an investment of time and resource that not all partner organisations are able to provide.

Wider learning relates to central vs local response to issues such as provision of PPE, housing the homeless and rough sleepers, and provision of food and equipment to the vulnerable. This is currently playing out on test and trace and how local lockdowns should be managed, with ongoing tension between national and local government.

Many councils understand the importance of data in supporting recovery planning decision making, to effectively understand where to prioritise resources and activity in the right way and at the right time to achieve the right outcomes.

## The future?

Covid-19 has only increased volatility and uncertainty for local government, and when working with councils delivering Financial Foresight we have prioritized scenario planning to support strategic financial planning. Understanding best, worst and optimum case scenarios from the impact of the pandemic are critical in strategic discussion when setting next year's budget and updating the Medium-Term Financial Plan – impacts on the place and communities, as well as on the council services and the council as an organization. Some councils are more confident than others in being able to manage their financial position during 2020/21 but all are concerned about 2021/22 and beyond. And it is not just Covid-19 scenarios that need to be understood, but other global, national and local issues that will impact over the medium term, including the impact of a no deal Brexit trade deal, and new government policies such as those expected on devolution and health and social care integration.

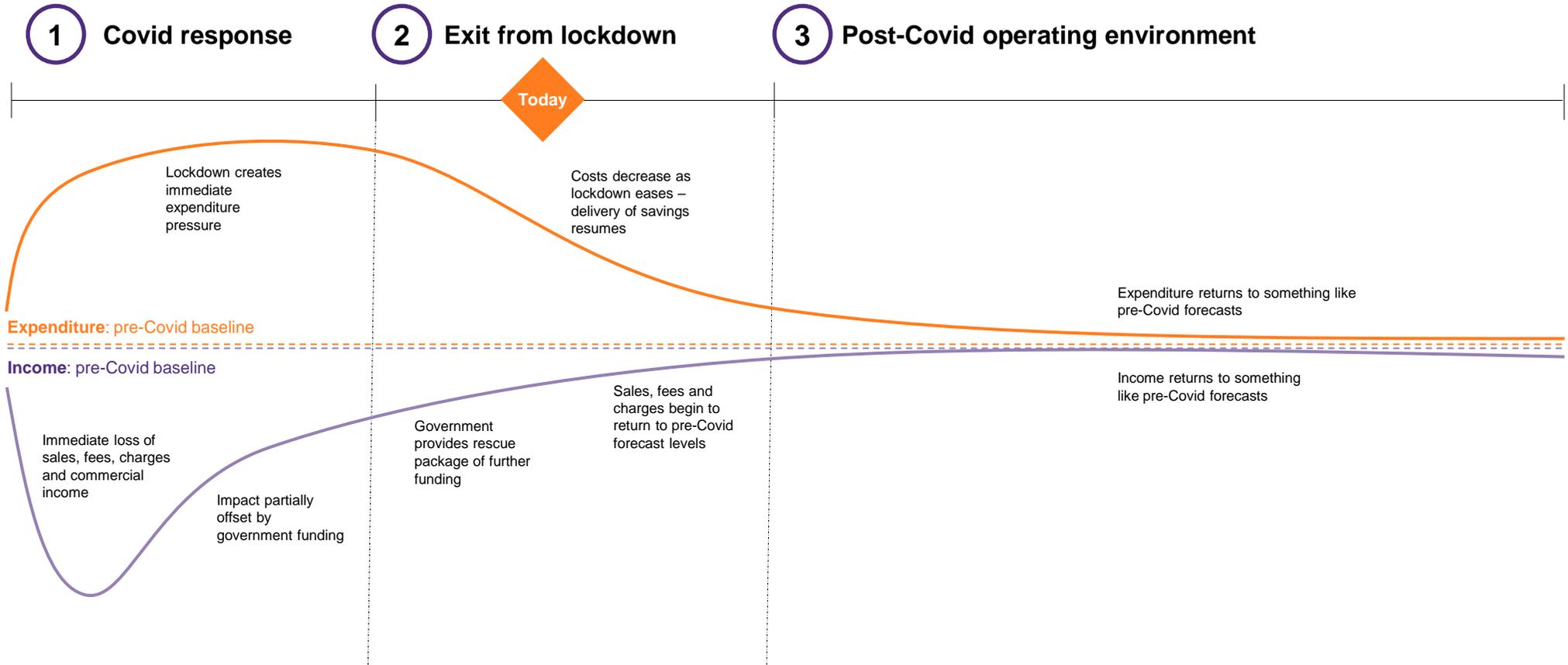
As already noted, places will vary depending on their socio-economic and demographic characteristics, but all councils are working through demand impacts arising from the ongoing pandemic and the associated recession, and ensuring their workforce continue to be supported to ensure they remain personally resilient.

Until a vaccine has been successfully produced and rolled out, the public health threat remains, and there are likely to be further local lockdowns, such as we have seen in Leicester and towns in the north west of England. There could be difficult trade offs for national and local politicians to consider to avert further waves of restrictions. For example to keep schools open after they return in September, will there be a need to increase restrictions elsewhere to ensure the cases of Covid-19 remain at a management level?

Local government has always demonstrated a remarkable resilience in managing significant challenges, including ten years of austerity, and being at the forefront of the pandemic response. And whilst much uncertainty remains, we are confident that councils will continue to demonstrate the capacity to lead places, deliver services

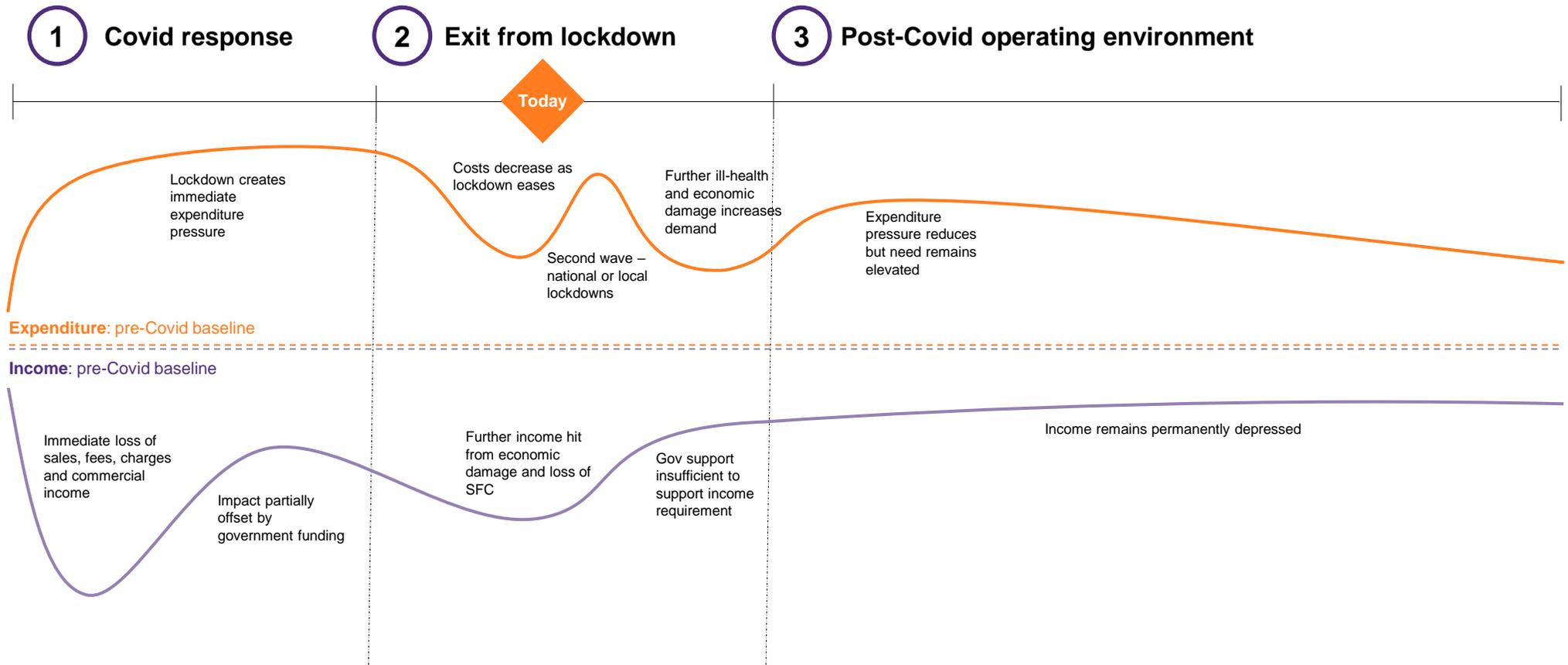
# Example scenarios

## Scenario 1 – swift return to normality



# Example scenarios (Cont'd)

## Scenario 2 – second wave and ongoing disruption



# Scenarios and hypotheses

## Local authority areas in 12-24 months?

Theme	Reasonable worst case	Reasonable best case
<b>People &amp; community</b>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multiple lockdowns and ongoing disruption</li> <li>Community dependency and expectation of sustained response</li> <li>Turbulence and activism within the VCS</li> <li>Socio-economic inequality is compounded</li> <li>Failure of leisure and cultural services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Smooth exit from lockdown to a “new normal”</li> <li>Community mobilisation is channelled into ongoing resilience</li> <li>Strengthened VCS relationships and focus</li> <li>Systemic response to inequality is accelerated</li> <li>Leisure and cultural services adapted to social distancing</li> </ul>
<b>Business &amp; economy</b>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16% reduction in GVA for 2020 based on OBR reference scenario</li> <li>Slow / uneven economic recovery and “long tail” on unemployment</li> <li>Central gov / BEIS focus investment on areas furthest behind</li> <li>Loss of tourist &amp; student spend causes unmitigated damage</li> <li>'V' shaped recovery results in 2-3 year recovery period</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5-10% reduction in GVA</li> <li>Rapid economic recovery with employment levels close behind</li> <li>Central government “back winners” with investment</li> <li>Adaptation allows resumption of tourist and student economy</li> <li>Business base is weighted towards growth sectors</li> </ul>
<b>Health &amp; wellbeing</b>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased demand and escalating need due to fallout from lockdown</li> <li>Newly-vulnerable cohorts place strain on the system</li> <li>Unit costs increase further as markets deteriorate and providers fail</li> <li>SEND transport unable to adapt to social distancing</li> <li>Imposed disruption of care system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive lifestyle changes and attitudes to care reduce demand</li> <li>Needs of newly vulnerable cohorts met through new service models</li> <li>New investment in prevention and market-shaping manage costs</li> <li>New ways of working leading to stronger staff retention</li> <li>Locally-led reform of health and care system</li> </ul>
<b>Political &amp; regulatory</b>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local government side-lined by a centralised national recovery effort</li> <li>Unfunded burdens (e.g. enforcement and contact-tracing)</li> <li>Councils in the firing line for mismanaging recovery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local government empowered as leaders of place-based recovery</li> <li>Devolution and empowerment of localities</li> <li>Councils at the forefront of civic and democratic renewal</li> </ul>
<b>Environment</b>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opportunity missed to capture and sustain environmental benefits</li> <li>The end of the high street / town centres</li> <li>Emissions and air quality worsened by avoidance of public transport</li> <li>Capital programmes stuck</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to invest in transport modal shift and green infrastructure</li> <li>Changed working patterns rejuvenate town centres</li> <li>Sustained impact on emissions due to new behaviours</li> <li>New, shovel-ready infrastructure programmes</li> </ul>
<b>Organisational</b>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inadequate funding forces fiscal constraint</li> <li>Working practices return to status quo – increased operating costs</li> <li>Imposed structural change within the place</li> <li>Austerity 2</li> <li>Commercial portfolio becomes a liability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adequate funding enables a programme of targeted investment</li> <li>Learning and adaptation to new operating environment</li> <li>Energised system-wide collaboration and reform</li> <li>Fiscal reform and civic renewal</li> <li>Commercial portfolio reshaped for economic and social gain</li> </ul>

# What strategy is needed in response?

*From response to recovery*

## Learn, adapt and prioritise

- Develop and test hypotheses around impact on place, services, operations, finances
- Design rapid interventions - implement, test and evaluate
- Learning from the response to lock in the good stuff – reflection on operations, services and the system
- Set priorities and principles – what is the Council's purpose in an uncertain context and where will it focus?

*Mitigating the worst case*

## Consolidate and build resilience

- Ensure that emergency management and response structures are resilient for the long haul
- What is the minimum operating model to deliver this?
- Predict and model demand for social care and assess care market vulnerability
- Contingency plans for structural disruption
- Re-evaluate infrastructure pipeline

*Steering towards the best case*

## Invest in renewal

- Programme of priority-based investment framed by recovery and renewal
- Focus on inequality, community resilience, targeted economic stimulus, skills and employment support and adapting public spaces
- Continued system leadership, pushing for positive reform and resilience



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