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UKHACC Principles for a healthy and green recovery

Alongside the tragic loss of life, the Covid-19 outbreak has revealed both the best of us – in terms of co-operation and adaptability – and the vulnerabilities of our social and economic systems. Our health and care services have been stretched to – and possibly beyond – breaking point. And the UK economy has taken an unprecedented blow that will likely dwarf the aftermath of the 2008/09 global financial crisis. The direct costs of responding to the crisis and the impact of lockdown mean the UK faces huge debt and a massively weakened economy. As we move out of the initial crisis response, the thoughts of government, business and wider civic society are turning to recovery, not least in addressing the massive and long-lasting economic challenges that lie ahead.

The nature of that recovery is not yet set. The UKHACC believes that the way we come out of this crisis will be of fundamental importance to our ability to cope with the next. Short-cuts now will leave us vulnerable in the future and, while Covid-19 is a global health emergency now, we know that the much bigger threat to human health is climate change. Our response to Covid-19 should not jeopardise our ability to respond to that.

While much progress was being made in the mitigation of climate change, recovery now cannot mean a return to the status quo ante, much less signal a rowing back on that progress. And, importantly, both Covid-19 and climate change are fundamentally health challenges, so any recovery must keep health considerations at its heart. Here we set out 6 principles that UKHACC believe should underpin the UK's strategy for recovery.

Principles for a healthy and green recovery

1. Recovery should prioritise the health of people and the planet.

Recovery should not sacrifice environmental standards. Instead, every decision should be assessed in relation to its impact on health and climate, as much as on the economy. These assessments should be made public, and measures should aim not just to protect progress that has already been made but to go further in improving health and the environment.

2. Recovery should build a resilient and sustainable economy for the future

Rather than seeking to return to how things were six months ago, any recovery strategy will need to build greater resilience in our economy, and also in our key services, social systems, population health and environment. That resilience must encompass the ability to adapt and change to unexpected conditions, as well as predictable challenges, and to reduce risks, not least from climate change.

3. Recovery should accelerate carbon reduction

An equitable economic recovery, consistent with decarbonisation before 2050 and improving health and wellbeing, is not simply a question of avoiding investment in carbon intensive sectors and businesses. In seeking to kick-start growth, public investment that is targeted on



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low carbon and carbon *reduction* industries, which tend to be labour intensive and high technology, will yield jobs, economic value and environmental benefits, bolstering resilience and promoting health.

4. Recovery should reduce health inequalities

The Covid-19 outbreak has revealed further underlying inequalities in health outcomes in the UK, and reminds us that crises do not affect everyone equally. As health professionals we have seen those most vulnerable suffer the most. The same is true for the health impacts of climate change and environmental degradation more widely. In leading the recovery from Covid-19, Government should ensure that these inequalities are narrowed, not least to build resilience for future crises.

5. Recovery should follow the science

The recovery should draw on the insights of health and climate scientists, as well as economists. Dialogue between the scientific community and Government has been central to the initial crisis response to Covid-19, and it will be important that the scientific, medical and nursing communities are also involved in shaping the recovery too. The way in which we rebuild our economy and society after this crisis will play a huge part in our ability to respond to future crises, and scientific expertise will be crucial to that.

6. Recovery is everyone's responsibility

The impact of Covid-19 has revealed both the need, and our capacity, for collaboration, across sectors. Businesses, public services, and communities have all stepped up to find new ways to respond. Our recovery also needs to draw on all of the talent our country has to offer – not least the health professionals who have played such an important role so far. The recovery should be shaped collaboratively, building on the best of what has been seen during the initial crisis.

Priorities for Action

The principles that should inform Government's strategy for economic recovery are necessarily broad, with the detail of policy coming as the strategy develops. However, UKHACC believes that there are some critical priorities for action that Government should act on immediately.

1. Investment in businesses and employment that do not harm health and the environment

The central objective for any recovery plan will be to stimulate new business activity and employment. UKHACC believes that in order to promote resilience and sustainability, all economic stimuli should be conditional on measurable performance improvements in relation to health and climate change. Priority for public investment should be given to sustainable industries and employment, which will help to create jobs in 'sunrise' industries, as well as improving health and mitigating dangerous climate change. Government should prioritise

investment in training for people laid-off as a result of Covid-19 for employment in those sectors.

2. Energy

Investment in renewable energy generation and energy efficiency businesses will be part of a healthy and sustainable recovery, with the potential to create high quality employment. But the Covid-19 lockdown has also seen the longest ever period of coal-free electricity in Britain, with over thirty days of coal-free generation. UKHACC believes that this is the moment for the Government to finally phase out this source of power in Britain. This should be coupled with a range of new incentives to homes and businesses to invest themselves in renewable power and energy efficiency. In particular, accelerating the replacement of gas-fired heating would increase resilience, mitigate climate change and improve health.

3. Transport

The lockdown has seen a dramatic, if temporary, modal shift, as well as far less travel overall as the way that people work, access services and socialise has adapted to the virus. While technology has been central to this, in addition, more people have been getting around by walking or cycling and it is clear that for many people, this model of urban movement is an attractive one, as well as one that is healthier and more sustainable. This is an opportunity to rethink fundamentally how we move around towns and cities. Already, local authorities have temporarily rebalanced the space available to motorised and non-motorised movement, and the Government's commitment of resources to help councils build on this into the future is to be welcomed. But UKHACC believes that Government should go further and commit to dramatically extending the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy, with binding targets, to lock in as much as possible of the modal shift we have witnessed.

4. Food

The concerns about food supply and distribution that manifested in the early stages of the Covid-19 lockdown were eventually allayed, but the early difficulties do reveal some of the fragilities of our food system. Future crises, especially those related to climate change, may prove more damaging – many of the most extreme climate vulnerabilities fall on places from which we import food. We therefore need to make the food system more resilient, and enable it to promote community resilience through healthier diets. UKHACC would like to see the National Food Strategy completed, such that we can make sure that the UK's food is more healthy and sustainable.

5. Health Care systems

The health sector, responsible for 5% of all GHG emissions in the UK should play a leading role in decarbonisation. We are playing our part in NHS England's Greener NHS programme, which we hope will be a lever and leader in ensuring that other sectors responsible for significant emissions publish their own plans for rapid decarbonisation before the current legislation of 2050.