

Review Committee – 1 September 2020

Minutes of the meeting of the **Review Committee** held on **1 September 2020** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr J C Burton
Vice-Chairman: Cllr D J Sperring

Cllr Mrs D L Belton
Cllr C C Cannell
Cllr Mrs J R Gooding
Cllr B T Hazlewood
Cllr N J Hookway

Cllr Mrs C M Mason
Cllr Mrs J E McPherson
Cllr R Milne
Cllr Mrs C A Pavelin
Cllr M G Wilkinson

VISITING MEMBERS

Cllrs D S Efde, C M Stanley, M J Steptoe and A L Williams.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mrs D Hoy, Mrs L Shaw and P J Shaw

SUBSTITUTES

Cllr M Hoy - for Cllr Mrs D Hoy
Cllr R R Dray - for Cllr P J Shaw
Cllr D Merrick - for Cllr Mrs L Shaw

OFFICERS PRESENT

A Hutchings - Strategic Director
A Law - Assistant Director, Legal & Democratic
S Worthington - Principal Democratic & Corporate Services Officer

129 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2020 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman in due course.

130 COVID-19: INITIAL LESSONS LEARNED

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director summarising the key learning that the Council has drawn from its experiences of managing the COVID-19 pandemic from March to July 2020.

It was noted that this was an initial report and that there would be further, more detailed reports to the Committee.

Members made reference to the importance of learning from the COVID-19 situation and of assessing what did not work so well and could have been done differently, looking chronologically from April 2020 onwards, as well as what had worked well. It was important for reports to be objective so that

lessons could be learned on how improvements could be made where necessary, drawing on what had gone well. In addition, where things worked well it was equally important to look in detail at why and to see if this might be transferable to other areas where things hadn't gone so smoothly.

The following Member observations were noted:

- Paragraph 3.4 omitted reference to the inability of officers to print documents. Planning application consultation letters were not sent out to relevant stakeholders and residents; notices were posted up at relevant premises. This was not reflected in the report. Officers advised that this issue would be reflected upon.
- Paragraph 5.8 should have included reference the shortcomings in emergency planning arrangements which Members claimed had been inadequate. Officers emphasised that emergency planning was usually predicated on the basis of short term contingency planning for events that lasted days or, at most, weeks, rather than months as had been the case with the unprecedented pandemic. The Council's emergency response plan had been strengthened and there would be further, more detailed reports on COVID-19 to the Committee.
- Group Leader meetings had emphasised the importance of daily briefings being circulated to all Members and of confirmation being received that Members had read the briefings. It was important to know if the information in the briefings was appropriate and accessible. Officers stressed that it was possible for individuals to disable read receipts in Outlook. However, there were regular updates on the Council website, social media channels and Tell Me More. It was, for example, possible to ascertain how many times a Tell Me More update had been opened. It was noted that a short summary on communications during COVID-19 and on engagement with such communications would be provided to Members in the next report.
- The Council Reception had been closed during lockdown and there had been problems with the telephone system, which were still unresolved. A remedy for this was required urgently. Regular updates should be provided to the Committee on this. Officers confirmed that a new telephony contract would be in place in November which would see the replacement of the current Council switchboard. Members could email officers, including the Managing Director and Strategic Director, with details of any residents in need; in addition, Reception was now offering bookable appointments for residents.
- The way in which officers had been redeployed and that service delivery had continued was commended and it was hoped that there might be some form of recognition of this in the future. Members questioned whether the future working patterns of officers would be examined in detail and reported to the Committee. Officers advised that a report on the

Connect programme had been considered by the Executive in July and that the impact of COVID was also being considered as part of the asset delivery programme.

- There had been issues with IT equipment for Members with no training given to enable them to be able to operate remotely. It was emphasised that 'one size fits all' did not align with equalities and diversity legislation.
- Were rough sleepers still being accommodated? Officers confirmed that the Council was working with CHERS and ECC on the prevention of rough sleeping as a key priority.
- The Community Hub served as an important lifeline to vulnerable residents but the delay in this being up and running was regrettable. The Council should have been more proactive rather than relying on guidance from central government. Officers emphasised that there were plans which would enable the Hub to be stood up again should the need arise.
- Paragraph 6.2 included reference to a COVID-19 local outbreak response plan and the Leader of the Green Group asked whether a copy of this might be made available to him. Officers confirmed that this was an operational document that was in the process of being finalised and would then be circulated to Members for information.
- The bulky waste service had not fully operated during the lockdown.
- The move towards hot desking and remote working by staff was a positive move in the right direction. In addition, the chat section on the website had proven useful and worked well.
- Further reports to the Committee should include the impact of the pandemic on staffing, staff efficiencies and any cost savings and the pressures on staff and work-life balance for staff. It would be useful for the next report to be set out into different sections including, for example, technology; services; communications; guidance.

In concluding the debate, officers emphasised that the report was not intended to provide a detailed analysis at this stage, but rather a summary of all initial feedback received. Subsequent reports could, for example, provide more detailed analysis of leisure services, or waste collection. In response to Members' interest in the format and content of future reports to the Committee on COVID-19, it was agreed that any suggestions could be emailed to the Chairman of the Committee and to the Strategic Director.

Resolved

That the report be noted. (SD)

131 REVIEW COMMITTEE'S ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee considered the draft Annual Report for 2019/20.

The Chairman proposed that next year's report include a preface from the Committee Chairman and that officers would also look at the format of reports produced by other local authorities to see whether the report could be refined.

Members supported this approach and stated that the format of the current report did not provide any details of any of the work streams.

In response to a Member question relating to paragraph 10.6 of the report, it was confirmed that the Private Members' Bill referred to the Local Electricity Bill and this would be amended in the Annual Report.

In response to a further Member comment that more detail should be provided in the report, the Chairman emphasised that the report was intended to be an overall summary of work conducted during the year and that work would take place to modernise next year's report. In the meantime it was agreed that Members could email any comments on the report to the Chairman and that a finalised draft would be emailed to the Committee prior to submission to Council next month.

Resolved

That the Annual Report be submitted to Council, subject to the amendments detailed above. (ADLD)

132 KEY DECISIONS DOCUMENT

A Member observed that the Environmental Health service plans for the food and health and safety teams (6/20) decision was normally taken earlier. Officers would provide an update on this to Members outside the meeting.

133 WORK PLAN

Officers advised that templates would be updated to include the work plan for all meetings of the Committee. The latest copy of the work plan, updated since the last meeting, would be emailed to the Committee outside the meeting.

In response to a Member question relating to progress on the Management Companies and Managing Agents in New Developments Working Group, which had met in January 2020 officers advised that this would be followed up and contact made with the Chairman of the Working Group.

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It was also noted that the issue raised at the last meeting relating to a Member request for details of how the £900,000 funds for management of the pandemic from central government had been spent and the reasons and rationale for the allocations should be added to the work plan although this could be included in the COVID-19 update reports as appropriate.

The meeting closed at 9.05 pm.

Chairman

Date

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