

Overview and Scrutiny Committee
20 JULY 2020

Present: Councillors: Tony Bevis (Chairman), Brian Donnelly (Vice-Chairman), Roy Cornell, Michael Croker, Billy Greening, Josh Potts, David Skipp, Ian Stannard and James Wright

Apologies: Councillors: Leonard Crosbie, Frances Haigh, Nigel Jupp, Tim Lloyd and Roger Noel

Absent: Councillor Jack Saheid

SO/12 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on the 1st June 2020 were approved and signed as a correct record.

SO/13 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interests.

SO/14 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements.

SO/15 **A PRESENTATION ON THE COUNCIL'S WORK ON COVID-19 TO DATE**

The Director of Community Services provided a short presentation on Community Response, Support Grants and the re-opening of town centres. This was only a fraction of the response work that had been undertaken by the Council. In general the response had been excellent.

With regard to the Community support model, he highlighted the following areas:

- The twenty seven hubs that had been set up around the District that had supported local communities. The Council had moved quickly with E-forms and support requests sent out on the 17th March, so were one of the first Councils in the County to be in a position to support residents and volunteers. Each hub had a co-ordinator and a HDC liaison officer. Everyone on the vulnerable group list had been contacted, and over 2000 calls were made to ensure the needs of this group were met.
- In the fourteen weeks, 1,647 volunteers had dealt with 4,360 requests for food support, with a similar number for medication support. Horsham Hub and Age UK had utilised a slightly different model from HDC, but both had been very active. A new model had been implemented by HDC at the start of July and calls were now going directly to Age UK

- The Community team were now discussing with Parish Councils and the Hubs what their emergency plans were should there be a second wave of the virus.

He went on to talk about the Business Support Grants and said:

- 2,277 grants had been verified and issued since the 7th April, totalling £28m. In terms of small businesses, 866 grants went to retail and hospitality businesses, and only one was waiting verification and six were under review. £870k of discretionary grants had been approved to the 16th June.
- Taxis and market traders had been given support as well as those with external costs. The scheme had been re-opened on the 6th July and would be run on a weekly basis until the money provided by the government had run out.
- There had been an impact on council tax and business rate collection, which were lower than in previous years. Recovery work was being focused on at this point.

He went on to talk about the High Street Safety Fund and said that the Council had been provided with £120k from the government's fund, and how this had been utilised.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were made:

- That whilst there had been a great number of volunteers, it was not appropriate to say that there had been too many. There were a lot of community minded people in the District, and this had been of great help during the initial lock down period. The Community Development team were looking at how the Hubs could continue.
- That it was down to the local residents to utilise the pavements sensibly when social distancing.

SO/16 **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY**

The Chief Executive introduced the report and said that the 2020/21 Budget had been approved in February 2020 and near balanced budgets were projected through to 2023/24 on the assumption that business transformation continued and the Council generated further income to mitigate against cost pressures.

The impact of the COVID 19 pandemic was having a severe impact on residents, businesses and the Council itself. The immediate effect would result in a significant overspend in 2020/21, and much lower levels of income were anticipated in the future. The Council would have to fundamentally review, change or even close its services to ensure it had a balanced budget in the years to come. Without action this would result in a budget gap of up to £3m in 2021/22 and significant budget gaps through to 2023/24. The report was written in the context of unprecedented levels of uncertainty and provided a snapshot of

where finances were today. As the situation becomes clearer there would be further updates setting out a more developed response and containing plans to tackle the budget gaps, working towards setting a balanced 2021/22 budget in February 2021.

In the ensuing discussion, the following matters were raised:

- That any agreement with Places Leisure would be brought to Council, but authority to make the decision was sought to be delegated to the relevant portfolio holder and Director responsible. There was a standing three week approval period, provided by the operators of the centres, from getting funds before the leisure centres could open. The model for leisure centres had changed significantly since social distancing.
- That Members would have an opportunity to debate and vote on the matter at the next meeting of Council.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

SO/17 **KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR ANNUAL REPORT**

The Chief Executive introduced the report and said that it provided the Committee with information to help it carry out its role of monitoring the internal and external delivery of services. The report went up to and included March 2020, so there was only one week of COVID-19 impact in the figures.

An analysis of Key Performance Indicators showed that out of the 19 indicators with targets, 14 indicators had met or exceeded targets; 4 were close to target, and 3 missed the target. For those that record data only 9 made improvements on last year; 1 was the same or close to last year's figure and 4 showed as not performing as well. For those that had not made target work was continuing to make improvements, although the impact of COVID-19 would be seen going forward.

He went on to highlight the following indicators

- The number of calls abandoned, was at 5%, an ambitious target for any organisation, and the Council had attained 5.63%.
- The percentage of invoices paid on time was targeted at 95%, which was an ambitious target. In terms of paying utility bills, the percentage was artificially depressed, as any dispute over a bill across any of the councils sites meant that the KPI was impacted.
- The Business Rates: Rateable Value was not possible to control. There would be a change following COVID, as a number of businesses would go into administration.

In the ensuing discussion, the following issues were raised:

- That the number of fly tipping enforcement notices had come down year on year as a result of the council's publicity campaigns and enforcement measures. This had become a major problem in the district as a result of regular fly tippers. Whilst there had been fewer actions, they had been more targeted.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

SO/18 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT**

The Chief Executive introduced the report, which provided a review of the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the municipal year 2019/20

Resolved: That the Committee note the Annual Report and refer it to be noted at Council.

SO/19 **UPDATE FROM TASK AND FINISH GROUPS**

Councillor Donnelly, as Chairman of the Off Street Parking Task and Finish Group, reported that it had been the intention of the Group to meet in July to finalise the report, but as a result of current circumstances, this had not yet happened. It was intended that a meeting would be convened shortly.

Councillor Skipp, as Chairman of the Health Task and Finish Group, reported that the impact of COVID-19 at the local level meant that it would be difficult to provide a report of any benefit to residents, so he suggested that it be put into abeyance. The Chairman concurred, and asked that mental health provision be included in the Group's remit, once it restarted.

Resolved: That the reports be noted.

SO/20 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chairman asked that Members of the Committee consider further Task and Finish Groups in order that they could be discussed at the next meeting of the Committee.

SO/21 **CABINET FORWARD PLAN**

The Forward Plan was noted.

The meeting closed at 7.16 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm

CHAIRMAN