

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD ON TUESDAY 10 NOVEMBER 2020 AT 4:00 P.M.

VIA REMOTE ACCESS

PART 1

PRESENT:

Councillors

Jones, B. (Vice-Chairman)

Allen, F.W.C.

Davis, Mrs. M.A.

Freeman, Miss M.A.

Hewitt, P.M.

Smith, C.D.

Sutton, Mrs. H.M.

Thompson, Mrs. S.L.

Todd, Mrs. D.M.

Witton, P.T.

Woodhead, P.E.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were submitted for Councillors C. Bennett (Chairman) and Ms. A.J. Dunnett.

In the Chairman's absence the meeting was chaired by Councillor B. Jones (Vice-Chairman).

2. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restrictions on Voting by Members and Party Whip Declarations

No declarations of interests or party whip declarations were received.

3. Minutes

The Minutes of the previous meetings held on 26 November 2019 and 13 January 2020 were approved.

4. Covid-19 Update

The Managing Director provided the Committee with the following updates on Covid-19 related matters:

- On 29 October the Staffordshire Local Resilience Forum (LRF) declared a major incident on the basis of the County being moved into 'tier-2' restrictions, and the NHS starting to experience significant pressures, especially from individuals with Covid-19 related issues.

- The implement of tier-2 on 31 October coincided with the Prime Minister's announcement that day of a new national lockdown for England from 5 November to 2 December.
- The new lockdown was however quite different from the one in March, as most business sectors now remained open and trading, along with the education sector. Hospitality, leisure services, and non-essential retail had however been required to close again. Furthermore, there was no national shielding programme in place this time.
- With regards to the Council specifically, most staff had continued to work from home so there was not the same level of transition needed this time, and all services, bar a few exceptions, were generally operating at normal level. The main exceptions being the closedown of leisure and culture facilities managed by Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles (IHL), along with non-essential retail at the indoor and outdoor markets operating in the District.
- Key priorities for Officers were similar to those in wave 1, with support being provided to the local test and trace programme, advice to businesses on compliance with the current regulations and restrictions, payments to businesses via two new funding schemes, and taking enforcement action where necessary.
- In respect of those persons classified as being Clinically Extremely Vulnerably (CEV), of which there were 4,267 in the District, they would be receiving a letter this week from the NHS signposting them to local authorities for support, which would include connecting them to priority supermarket delivery slots for food shopping, and ensuring that community pharmacies undertook delivery of prescriptions, for which they were paid to do.
- The Council was also working with the Cannock and Hednesford branches of the Salvation Army, the Cannock and Rugeley Foodbanks and other voluntary organisations in the District to provide support if needed
- For the seven-day period up to 6 November, the number of positive cases of Covid-19 in the District was 322.5 per 100,000 people. Although a high rate, it was currently the lowest in Staffordshire relative to other local authority areas in the County, following a period of the District having the highest case numbers. For those individuals aged 60+, the rate was 261.2 cases per 100,000, which was below the District average.
- There were approximately 103 open incidents in the District, two of which were regarded as high risk because of what was involved. One was in a working men's club and the other a nursing home.
- Testing rates for the District were currently 435.8 per 100,000 people: the fifth highest rate in Staffordshire and above the regional average. Of those tested, the positivity rate was 11.6%, slightly below the regional average. The testing centre located at the Civic Centre site, was well utilised, and the Council had been working hard with partners to establish an equivalent centre in Rugeley,

an application for which had been submitted to the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) this week. Additionally, ad-hoc testing sessions were also taking place, with one arranged at the Norton Canes Community Centre on 13 November.

- Staffordshire had been selected as one of 67 pilot areas for lateral flow testing to be conducted. Such tests gave results in only 20 to 30 mins, thus provided a fast way to test the local population. Work was underway with colleagues at Staffordshire County Council (SCC) on the necessary arrangements for the pilot.
- At the end of the current lockdown Staffordshire would be put back into one of the restriction tiers, but the level chosen would depend on case rates and other factors. An assessment on this was expected to be made at the end of November or right at the beginning of December.
- Issues related to the pandemic were expected to continue for some months, and the usual winter pressures experienced by the NHS had yet been seen. The next few months would be especially challenging for all of the public sector, and the Council was working with all relevant organisations in Staffordshire to ensure the right actions were being taken to mitigate the impact and spread of Coronavirus.

The Vice-Chairman thanked all Council staff for their fantastic efforts to support residents, businesses and the wider community, and noted that although current figures were a cause for concern, the data was moving in the right direction, but the community must need to keep working hard to try and achieve some semblance of normality before Christmas time.

In response to a query from a Member concerning the number of open incidents across the District, the Managing Director advised that a comparison couldn't be made to the first lockdown as an operational system for testing was not in place until the end of that period.

Another Member also thanked the Council staff for their work during the pandemic, even when issues were not as critical, noting that it was appreciated by all Members.

In response to a query from the same Member concerning the operation of the national and local test and trace systems and whether there was any pressure on Council staff to support the national scheme, the Managing Director advised that it was a complex and complicated system, with multiple different elements each operating specific aspects of it. The local level system was however working well in terms of successful contacts made. In terms of staffing pressures, much of the workload was between the Public Health function at SCC and this Council's Environmental Health team. Both parts of these teams were under a fair bit of pressure at present, and if several staff were tested positive and/or had to self-isolate then this would really impact what work could be done.

Another Member too thanked the Council staff for their work, along with Dr Richard Harling, Staffordshire Director of Public Health, and the SCC Cabinet member for Health, Care and Wellbeing, Johnny McMahon.

In response to a query from the same Member concern clusters and locations of positive cases in the District, the Managing Director advised that there were some restrictions on what could be disclosed in terms of specific facilities and streets, but the highest case rates a few weeks ago were in Cannock town centre wards, whereas as at 6 November, the Hednesford North area was now top of the list. Household transmission was a significant feature across the District, and most schools had been impacted, both at primary and secondary level. This was not just about pupils and staff with positive cases, but also affected those who were required to self-isolate.

5. Improving Community Wellbeing (Environment, Partnerships & Community Safety) Priority Delivery Plan Performance Update – Q1 and Q2 2020/21

The Committee received the latest performance information for the Priority Delivery Plan (Item 5.1 – 5.6).

The Managing Director advised that the performance information was as presented, and the Partnerships, Community Safety & CCTV Manager and Waste & Engineering Services Manager were both in attendance should any specific queried be raised.

The Partnerships, Community Safety & CCTV Manager reported that the work of the team had increased during the pandemic, but support from external and internal partners had improved drastically, which was a positive outcome from this situation.

In response to a query from a Member concerning the performance indicator for ‘Number of Tenancies Sustained’, the Committee was advised that a response would be sought from colleagues in Housing and circulated to Members via email once known.

In response to a query from the same Member concerning an update on the Council’s climate change work, the Waste & Engineering Services Manager advised that carbon literacy training had been arranged for relevant Officers and Members to book onto, and progress made on producing a costed action plan. The last piece of work to complete would be the citizens assembly.

In response to a query from the same Member concerning the reporting of vulnerabilities and how had this related to Covid-19, the Partnership, Community Safety & CCTV Manager advised that the department was working closely with the Environmental Health team on relevant issues, but referrals were coming through the normal mechanisms via the Community Safety Hub. Awareness raising was also happening from a Safeguarding perspective. There had been a number of cases during the first lockdown where the issues involved were more complex for a number of reasons.

In response to a query from another Member regarding the increase in good news stories, the Partnerships, Community Safety & CCTV Manager advised that work had been undertaken with the Council's Communications team to put out positive information and increase the use of social media platforms to get messages out. The ASB Worker had been helping out young people in the District back into education and employment opportunities. The aim was to ensure greater contact with residents through all available media channels and trying to celebrate success where possible and signpost services.

In response to a query from the same Member as to whether the issuing of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) included breaches of Covid-19 regulations, the Partnerships, Community Safety & CCTV Manager advised that the team did not issue FPNs for such matters. The Managing Director further advised that Officers would look at how this data could be collated and inserted into the report as it was useful for Members to be aware of.

6. Covid-19 Recovery Strategy

The Committee considered the Council's Covid-19 Recovery Strategy and associated action plans (Item 6.1 – 6.15).

The Managing Director advised that the strategy and its associated plans were relevant as the Council would move out of response phase again, and there would be a longer-term legacy impact from the pandemic on the Council and the District.

Key issues for the Committee's awareness under each of the four work streams were:

- **Financial recovery:** The Council was facing a deficit funding position. Although central government grant support of circa £2m had been provided, this was in comparison to a deficit in the region of £3m. It was expected that the Council would end this financial year £700,000 in the red, with the funding gap being covered by earmarked reserves. The pandemic had destroyed income levels, so the speed of financial recovery would be dependent on wider economic recovery.
- **Economic recovery:** Unemployment would be a semi-permanent feature for the District. Pre-Covid levels were the lowest ever seen and consistently below the regional average, so it had not been a massive issue over recent years. Now however the District had moved back to facing issues of unemployment, and the Council was working with businesses to support employment opportunities.

The District had a very high number of small businesses in operation, many of which suffered major cashflow problems during the first wave of the pandemic, so whilst there was a need to see what the impact from the second wave would be, the full impact wouldn't become clear until during 2021, particular after the end of the extended furlough scheme.

- Community recovery: The position on this was more positive, with a renewed focus on supporting vulnerable people and strengthened relations with the voluntary sector in the District, which would need to be maintained going moving forward.
- Organisational recovery: The pandemic had changed working practices for the Council (such as holding committees via 'Zoom'), and 80% of staff had been consistently working from home and doing well at it. As such, this raised questions about the need for physical office space. Staff had made use of new technologies and adapted to new ways of working, so it was important to keep this going. Crucially, the public had been able to keep in contact with the Council despite the continued closure of the reception services, and no complaints had been received so far about this. Finally, a cross-party Recovery Overview Board had been established that would receive regular, detailed updates on the delivery of the four action plans.

In response to a query from a Member concerning the use of reserves to support the finances and whether the Council would look to extend shared services or cut frontline services in the near future, the Managing Director advised that the use of reserves was not a sustainable solution, but would help the Council for the next 18 months. In terms of savings, no options were off the table for Members to consider and make decisions about. The situation was not helped by continued uncertainty about the future of local government funding, and so the Council had to be responsible and prudent by looking at all options to avoid deficits in the long-term.

In response to a query from a Member regarding engagement with the voluntary sector and how this would be continued going forward (including with parish and town councils), the Managing Director advised that pre-pandemic, the Council and the voluntary sector operated very differently from one another, but the events of this year had brought the two sides together, with strong relationships being built and expected to continue. It had been recognised that the Council should not rush into doing things that other organisations were better positioned to do, but conversely, there were certain things the Council could do and influence that voluntary groups could not.

A Member reported on a 'Pavement Parade' that took place on 8 November for Remembrance Sunday, the aim of which was to support those who could not attend a service this year due to social distancing restrictions in force. The parade had been extremely well supported and was covered by BBC Midlands Today, who as part of their broadcast interviewed a 100-year-old nurse who had served in Africa during World War 2.

The meeting closed at 5:13 p.m.

CHAIRMAN