

[Recording using Zoom](#) - Password: 8Q+f0%x^

Chairman - Councillor P M M Farrington

Present (for all or part of the meeting):-

Councillors:

F Beatty	Economic Development and Planning Portfolio
J M Pert	Community and Health Portfolio
J K Price	Environment Portfolio
R M Smith	Deputy Leader and Resources Portfolio
C V Trowbridge	Leisure Portfolio

Also in attendance Councillors A T A Godfrey and R Kenney

Officers in attendance:-

Mr T Clegg	Chief Executive
Dr T Redpath	Corporate Business and Partnerships Manager
Mr J Dean	Democratic Services Officer

CAB101 Minutes

Minutes of the meeting held on 2 April 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

CAB102 Covid19 Response and Service Update

The Leader of the Council highlighted that this was a unique meeting of the Cabinet as there were no proposals requiring a decision. Instead Councillor Farrington called upon his Cabinet colleagues to provide an update regarding activity carried out in their Portfolio(s) to combat the ongoing CV19 crisis. Councillors A T A Godfrey and R Kenney were invited to ask any questions of the Cabinet Members, following their presentations. In concluding his comments Councillor Farrington thanked Officers of the Council for their ongoing commitment and efforts.

Councillor R M Smith – Deputy Leader and Resources Portfolio

Finance

- £1.5 million negative impact forecast on Council finances from April to June 2020. Council had received £1.4 million allocation from Government

- Costs to the Council had increased by £78k due to increased spend on homelessness provision and other areas
- Noted £400k in lost income, mainly due to reduced income from car parking fees
- Had scrapped the 28-day payment period so businesses can be paid more quickly.
- Awarded £22 million in rate relief for retail, leisure and hospitality businesses – nearly 2,500 businesses in these sectors have no rates to pay
- Paid around £20 million in business support grants to 80% of those eligible – placing us in top third in the country for distribution
- Benefits claims had trebled

Human Resources

- Council sickness figures in 19/20 just over five FTE days – lower than the seven-day target.
- Established a programme of sourcing and distributing PPE for council and volunteers

Audit

- Officers assisting in other areas, including Revenues and Benefits, Community Hub

Corporate Business and Partnerships

- Planning a virtual awards ceremony to honour great work in the community
- Service level agreements paid early to community organisations worried they would not survive Covid-19
- Around 300 food parcels delivered to isolated people. More than 2,000 calls made to check on vulnerable residents.

Technology

- More than 155 staff able to work on computer system without coming into Civic Centre within two days of lockdown – that is 96% of office-based staff
- Call Centre was fully operational with most staff working from home
- Website has been available 99.99% of the time, .01% downtime was for updates to security, for example
- From holding 0 meetings via Microsoft Teams and Zoom previously – more than 100 held in April 2020

Law and Administration

- Virtual meetings delivered for Cabinet and Planning Committee for the first time

- Staff from Elections Team trained up to provide administration cover for bereavement services
- Legal and Elections staff helping with the community hub operation

Communications

- Increased web / social media engagement as community sought trusted information on service changes, help for vulnerable and business funding

Councillor Smith concluded his presentation by paying tribute to all Council Officers, and those employed by partner organisations, for their efforts in recent weeks.

Councillor Godfrey subsequently echoed these comments and sought clarification regarding Universal Credit claims, which were duly addressed by Councillor Smith.

The Leader of the Council also paid tribute to the Officers of the Revenues and Benefits Team who were working extra hours, including weekends and bank holidays, to deal with the increased demand on their service.

Councillor J M Pert – Community and Health Portfolio

Prior to his presentation, Councillor Pert paid tribute to all NHS/Social Care and Community Support workers for their ongoing efforts under the current circumstances.

Community Hub

- Detailed creation of the Community Hub
- Noted efforts in collating/distributing food parcels and other essential items to vulnerable residents
- Team had contacted 4000+ people and written to a further 2000
- Service had been well received and garnered much praise

Voluntary Sector

- Funding had been redirected early to assist efforts of the voluntary sector
- Were supporting Staffordshire Women's Aid who were reporting an increase in domestic violence referrals
- Continued to monitor safeguarding referrals and address those examples of anti social behavior
- Would be writing to Voluntary Sector partners to thank them for their efforts during this time

Health and Housing

- Every rough sleeper given emergency accommodation within 48 hours – continued to work with them to keep a roof over their head through provision of extra support
- Continued to operate Housing Options Service
- 26 ‘homeless’ households given permanent accommodation during lockdown – paid tribute to work of Housing Plus
- Noted preparatory work undertaken in relation to Disabled Facilities Grants
- Housing Standards site visits continued to be undertaken

Councillor Godfrey thanked the Cabinet Member and his Officers for their ongoing efforts and extended the Labour Group’s thanks to all Health and Emergency Service Workers for their commitment to helping all members of our communities. Continuing, Councillor Godfrey sought clarification on points relating to homeless figures in the Borough, assistance for the gypsy and traveler community and continued funding for the voluntary sector – all of which were addressed appropriately by Councillor Pert.

Councillor J K Price – Environment Portfolio

Operations

- Noted increased demand placed on Bereavement Services who had increased capacity and extended hours of operation
- Led the way calling for clarity to Government legislation regarding closure of crematorium grounds
- Increased live streaming of funerals providing comfort for those who can’t attend due to social distancing
- Planned additional memorial services post ‘lockdown’ for those who have missed out because of Covid-19 restrictions
- Reported an extra 10% of calls to the contact centre in March, including worried residents needing help, yet the abandon rate had reduced
- Work had resumed on £2.5 million restoration of Victoria Park – developers used downtime to put safe social distancing system in place
- Working closely with Freedom Leisure to ensure facilities up and running as soon as possible
- People from the Stoke and Telford areas fined for flytipping - which was up in the Borough – but fly posting had fallen significantly
- Two indoor market traders – butchers and fruit and veg – using their stalls as base for delivery service
- Charging on all car parks suspended during lockdown – extended hours at Riverside to support key workers
- All car parks listed on ‘nhs free parking’ website – aimed at letting NHS and critical workers find parking options quickly and easily

- No notices served for non-compliance on closure of local businesses - unlike other areas of the county / UK
- Streetscene still litter picking, emptying litter bins, cutting grass – but team also supporting waste collections and bereavements services
- Residual waste (green bin) increased by 15%, recycling sent to processing up by more than 20% since blue bag introduced.

Upon invitation, Councillor Godfrey raised points of clarification regarding bins collections, the provision of PPE for refuse operatives and taxi drivers to which the Cabinet Member responded accordingly.

Councillor Farrington reported that he had been working with Staffordshire County Council colleagues in an effort to reopen Recycling/Waste centres in the Borough.

Councillor F Beatty – Economic Development and Planning Portfolio

Development

- First ever virtual planning committee to be convened using the ‘Zoom’ application, and to be held every two weeks rather than three
- More than 1000 local businesses contacted directly to make sure they knew about grants and support available to them
- Extended consultation on the local plan by 3 weeks to make sure residents and businesses did not miss out on this important piece of work
- Smaller food and drink outlets had adapted to deliver take-out service – including many fish and chip shops
- More time granted to bid for £25 million in Government funds to improve the high street – new focus on post Covid-19 economic climate
- Ironman confirmed going ahead on 13 June 2021

Councillor Godfrey raised some concern regarding the future of the north end of Stafford town centre to which Councillor Beatty referred to the importance of the Future High Streets Fund bid in relation to this area of work.

Councillor Farrington noted that Stafford was in no worse position than most town centres in the country, but was seen as a favorable location for business to locate due to its geographical position and transport links.

Councillor Kenney thanked the Cabinet Member and her Officers for their efforts in supporting local businesses.

Councillor C V Trowbridge – Leisure Portfolio

- Confirmed that all sports facilities in the Borough were closed, reopening was dependent on future Government guidance

- Was pleased to see efforts of people to keep fit using on-line videos etc
- Thanked all those involved in the delivering of relief to vulnerable groups
- Noted food distribution hub established at Oxleathers public house and efforts of local people
- Encouraged use of Sport Stafford Borough web pages

Councillor Godfrey requested clarification regarding staff of Freedom Leisure and the maintenance/bringing back into use of leisure facilities post lockdown. Councillor Trowbridge reported that she had every confidence in Freedom Leisure to deliver their contracted services.

Councillor Farrington reaffirmed that any return to use of leisure facilities would be entirely based on Government advice.

Councillor Smith confirmed that Property Service continued to visit and maintain all Council owned properties, including those operated by Freedom Leisure.

Councillor P M M Farrington – Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council thanked all the Cabinet Members for their presentations, the content of which to be considered further at a future special meeting of Resources Scrutiny Committee.

Continuing, the key headlines of Business Support Grants allocations and effort to address homelessness were highlighted.

In conclusion Councillor Farrington praised the work of his Cabinet colleagues and their associated Officers for their continued hard work in these unprecedented times, and closed the meeting by wishing all those present well.

RESOLVED:- that the reports of the Members of the Cabinet be noted.

CHAIR