

Chairman - Councillor R P Cooke

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

Councillors:

A G R Brown

M G Dodson

I D Fordham

A T A Godfrey

A S Harp R A James

J A Nixon

G P Pardesi

M Phillips

Also present:-

Cabinet Member - Councillor J K Price - Environment Portfolio

Cabinet Member - Councillor R M Smith - Resources Portfolio

Cabinet Member - Councillor C V Trowbridge - Leisure Portfolio

Cabinet Member - Councillor F Beatty - Economic Development and
Planning Portfolio

Cabinet Member - Councillor J M Pert - Community and Health Portfolio

Also in Attendance - Councillors J Hood and W J Kemp

Officers in attendance:-

Mr T Clegg	-	Chief Executive
Mr B Kean	-	Head of Finance
Mr I Curran	-	Head of Law and Administration
Mr P Kendrick	-	Head of Technology
Mr N Raby	-	Head of Human Resources and Property Services
Mr R Simpson	-	Head of Operations
Mrs J Aupers	-	Head of Governance
Dr T Redpath	-	Corporate Business and Partnerships Manager
Mrs A Nevin	-	Health and Housing Manager
Miss M Smith	-	Economic Growth and Strategic Projects Manager
Mr W Conaghan	-	Press and Communications Manager
Mr A Bailey	-	Scrutiny Officer

RSC36 Minutes

The Minutes of the last meeting held on 20 February 2020, as published in Digest No 265, were submitted and signed.

RSC37 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from the Leader of the Council (Council P M M Farrington and from Councillors M V Holmes (Substitute G P Pardesi), R Kenney (Substitute I D Fordham) and P Roycroft (Substitute M Phillips).

RSC38 COVID19 Pandemic Stafford Borough Council Response

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive (V4 1/6/20) which provided an update on the Council's response to COVID-19 pandemic.

The Chief Executive explained that the Council's Cabinet and Leadership Team took responsibility for determining the Council's response to COVID 19, which had subsequently been declared a major incident. The Government had given the Council new responsibilities and guidance to respond to within short timescales that had not allowed normal scrutiny by Members. The recovery and reform phases of the major incident, which were set out in the report, would run concurrently and inform the future development of the Corporate Business Plan.

Continuing, the Chief Executive explained the Council's Leadership Team took responsibility for coordinating the management response to COVID 19 and agreed the following aims:-

- 1 To support the borough's residents, especially those who are vulnerable
- 2 To support the borough's businesses in line with government guidance/funding and reflecting local circumstances
- 3 To protect the safety of our members and employees in delivering critical services
- 4 To maintain the council's corporate infrastructure which underpinned the delivery of critical services

The Chief Executive then outlined the need to agree the priorities over the coming months and to consider re-aligning resources to deliver these. There was a need to imagine how the pandemic would change residents' lives, businesses and the council as an organisation. This work would be informed by the following four work streams:

- Economic Recovery
- Financial Recovery
- Community Recovery
- Organisational Recovery

Following the introduction, the Committee discussed the following aspects of the report with the Leadership Team and Cabinet Members:-

- All of the Committee thanked all Stafford Borough Council staff for continuing to deliver services under exceptional circumstances
- The need to ensure that all vulnerable residents were identified and supported
- How traders were being contacted in order provide support and access the Business Support Grant
- Praise for the Co-op food deliveries and a question about how long they would continue
- An update on Local Outbreak Control
- The success of Community Safe and Well Calls
- Liaison with the Stafford Member for Parliament
- Praise for Streetscene for their work undertaken during the crisis
- Concern that Ward Members were not informed by neighbouring authorities of their use of the Crown Hotel in Stone for rough sleepers
- Clarification of staffing requirements to deliver Business Rates Relief, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction
- Praise for the Benefits Team for their work undertaken during the crisis
- The current situation with regards to staff being able to take annual leave
- An update on the strategic Economic Growth projects including the Future High Streets Fund and clarification that all schemes were currently on track
- Clarification over the Leisure and Cultural Activities contract and Victoria Park Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Project
- Clarification over furloughed Freedom Leisure staff and the Gatehouse tickets refund scheme
- Concern from Stone Ward Members that they were not informed in advance that Stone Farmers Market was to be reintroduced
- Clarification over plans to reopen Stafford Indoor Market
- The benefits of allowing areas of grass to grow in order to develop natural meadows
- COVID19 testing arrangements for staff
- Clarification of support available for staff mental health and wellbeing
- Clarification over the Local Plan additional costs
- Concern over how the potential £2.4m deficit would be filled and the potential for future increases in Council Tax
- The signposting of information in relation to progress on Victoria Park
- The need for Central Government to be aware of the Council's financial concerns
- Clarification as to why it was likely that the longer-term impact would be unequal with the poorest people in the borough being hardest hit as a result of likely economic recession and resulting austerity measures

RESOLVED:- that in exercise of the powers delegated to the Committee, the following be noted:-

- (a) the actions and decisions taken by cabinet and council officers in the response phase of COVID 19 to ensure the delivery of critical services and compliance with government guidance;
- (b) The additional services provided and planned in response to COVID 19, including the community hub;
- (c) The progress in planning for the next two phases i.e. recovery and reform, which will run concurrently with response.

CHAIR