

COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY SCRUTINY PANEL

Virtual Meeting held on Thursday, 30th July, 2020 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor David Hennigan in the Chair;

Councillors Jim Blagden, Dale Grounds,
Kevin Rostance, Dave Shaw, John Smallridge
and Caroline Wilkinson.

Officers Present: Lynn Cain, Ruth Dennis, Mike Joy and
Shane Wright.

In Attendance: Councillor Daniel Williamson.

SC.1 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

SC.2 COVID-19 Response and Recovery

The Chairman welcomed everyone present to the inaugural meeting of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Panel.

The Panel had been established by Council following recommendations made by Cabinet, with the purpose of reviewing the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to take an active role in respect of the Council's agreed recovery plans. The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CFPS) and the Local Government Association (LGA) had both welcomed this course of action.

The terms of reference for the Panel were outlined in the report including a summary of what the Council had done so far accompanied by guidance released by the Centre for Public Scrutiny on the establishment of a COVID-19 related scrutiny panel.

The Chairman reiterated that he wanted the Panel to consider and make deliverable, tangible recommendations to Cabinet and did not wish to see the meetings become ineffective with unnecessary talking and little action. The Council would need to be fully prepared for a second wave of the virus should it arrive and be accompanied by the inevitable local or national lockdowns.

The Chairman particularly wished to assist local businesses as much as possible to reinvigorate the Ashfield's economy and would be paying special attention to any opportunities that may arise to offer the Council's support where needed.

Members were reminded that the meeting would enable them to consider the Council's first response to the pandemic and determine a suitable work programme for the Panel over the next four months.

Congratulations were placed on record for the amazing work undertaken by employees during the lockdown period and in particular the waste collection team, Charles Edwards, the Council's Environment and Cemeteries Manager and Helen Carlton-Ashton and the customer services team who had dealt with over 40,000 enquiries during that time.

The Vice Chairman also spoke about the resilience and care that had been shown by Ashfield's residents and all the NHS heroes that had gone above and beyond to keep the public safe. The Council had facilitated the distribution of over £18 million pounds of grant monies to assist local businesses during the outbreak and had recently commenced opening up the Council's high streets and town centres to welcome customers back and restart the local economy.

The Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services gave an outline of the expectations for Member-led scrutiny through the COVID-19 recovery period and reiterated that Members would play a large part in shaping the recovery and response framework. Priorities would need to be set based upon feedback from residents (and local communities) and what deliverable outcomes could be achieved within the Council's capabilities.

A request was also being made to the Leader of the Council for a COVID-19 recovery item to be placed on each Cabinet agenda for the foreseeable future, to enable the Panel to provide responsive feedback and recommendations for action as required.

The Scrutiny Research Officer screen shared a suggested work programme which outlined four potential meeting dates and topics for consideration. Members were reminded that local communities would play an important role in the District's recovery from the pandemic and Members were the vital conduit for disseminating the information/experiences from their electorate.

Members were encouraged to be proactive in seeking out the views of their residents to enable the Council to target their responses and recovery measure to those areas and people in most need. The Council's communications team would also be playing an interactive role in assisting with the publication and capture of any opportune/timely information to keep everyone fully briefed across all the Council's media platforms.

The Director of Legal and Governance and the Council's Strategic Lead for its COVID-19 response, talked through the summary of the work undertaken by the Council thus far in response to the outbreak. The Council was now moving onto its 'recovery' phase and making preparations for a potential second wave of the virus or a local lockdown if instructed by Government.

During the initial lockdown, the Council had worked with its partners to share information and endeavour to provide a uniform response to critical developments as they arose. The partnership network operated at different levels and included involvement by the Council with the following:-

The Nottingham & Nottinghamshire Local Resilience Forum

A management group for the co-ordination of emergency planning within Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. The Forum was led by Nottinghamshire Police and was made up of senior managers from the principal emergency planning and response organisations.

The Forum had the responsibility for achieving a coordinated response across Nottinghamshire to any major incident within its boundaries.

Multi-Agency Response Group

A Group that involved members from various agencies including Police, City, County and District Councils, Universities and the Clinical Commissioning Groups.

Thematic Groups

Sitting underneath the Forum, there were currently various thematic groups dealing with various county-wide responses to the outbreak including:

Health
Humanitarian
Economy
Communications
Local Authority.

The Council has been a key player in the Local Authority Group and has met regularly to primarily facilitate the continued delivery of its Tier 1 and 2 services. The Council has been very successful at delivering these services and ensured that messages have been shared in a consistent and organised manner with staff remaining flexible, reactive and adaptive to the ever changing environment.

ADC Incident Management Team

An internal group set up by the Council to enable Directors (all with specific COVID-19 response and recovery roles) to meet with the Council's Service Manager for Risk and Emergency Planning and Communications team, to facilitate the Council's local response to the outbreak as required.

The Council were currently working hard to prepare for a second wave of the outbreak or a local lockdown. They had been somewhat reassured however, that the structures installed and implemented for the initial outbreak had proved to be effective and resilient and would be held in hibernation ready to be reactivated if needed.

In the meantime, plenty of lessons were being learnt from neighbouring authorities and partner organisations and training sessions were regularly being held to share knowledge and ensure preparedness for any future outbreaks. The Cabinet had also recently considered and approved the Council's COVID-19 Recovery Strategy.

The Panel acknowledged how the outbreak had significantly changed the working arrangements for staff who were predominantly working from home if able to do so. The Council's finances had also been impacted and this would be monitored closely over the coming months.

Members did concur with the Director's comments that Ashfield was in a really good position to recover from the pandemic over the longer term and that the work of the Panel would add considerable value to that recovery process. The Council had embedded the COVID-19 recovery into its Corporate Plan and had already considered the increased risks and any mitigating factors as part of its Corporate Risk Register.

A discussion took place and Members considered the following:-

Question/Comment:	Response:
Fears for second wave around Christmas in the winter months; would the Council be informed of any lockdown prior to any release to the media?	The Council's Recovery Plan allowed for early involvement with established networks, particularly the Communications Cell, which would receive early Government notification and have prepared messages ready to be released, prior to the public being informed through the usual media platforms (lessons were learnt through the local lockdown in Leicester)
The Government response in early lockdown was confusing and stressful but their communication strategy is now improving	Agreed it was frustrating at first for the Council as messages kept changing and were slow to come through. Again the Communications Cell was helpful with this issue
Now that the 'Track and Trace' testing programme is improving, Councils need to ensure they have adequate and well placed testing stations available	Testing Stations are provided by Nottinghamshire County Council and the NHS
High Streets are now really struggling and the Council needs to undertake a total review of its town centres and the local economy following the outbreak	Work is currently underway to re-open the town centres; Ashfield have received £114,527 of a Government fund initiative to assist with local town centre recovery
Mental health issues experienced by many during lockdown is a worry and the problem will only escalate over the coming months	In relation to the wellbeing of employees, the Council have introduced a raft of measures including practical advice for home-working and access to counsellors for therapy etc. to reassure and offer support as required
The amazing work undertaken by local volunteers to assist others during the outbreak	Agreed

<p>Local retail businesses who have gone above and beyond to make their premises COVID secure to provide a safe environment for customers (often at additional costs to themselves) should be recognised</p>	<p>Good suggestion that can be communicated to the Director of Place and Communities for consideration. Many local businesses have also assisted with humanitarian aid (making donations to foodbanks etc.) whilst struggling financially themselves</p>
<p>Some shops are struggling with implementing social distancing measures and could maybe benefit from some support and guidance from other local shop owners with best practice</p>	<p>Another good suggestion that can be communicated to the Director of Place and Communities for consideration</p>
<p>Has the homeless strategy ensured that vulnerable people sleeping on the streets have received support during lockdown?</p>	<p>The Council have carried out over 90 homeless assessments during the lockdown and assisted with the provision of secure night-time accommodation. More funding is being allocated to ensure the problem doesn't escalate again during the winter months</p>
<p>Suggestion for an NHS memorial in Ashfield should be widened to honour all key workers and children who have cared for others during the pandemic and could be called 'The Peoples' Memorial'</p>	<p>Suggestion would be explored further at the next meeting of the Panel to be held on 3 September 2020</p>
<p>Request for all Directors to attend the next Panel meeting in September to brief Members on their designated area of COVID-19 response</p>	<p>An invite would be sent to Directors to attend the next Panel meeting on 3 September 2020</p>
<p>A request to invite Chief Inspector Mark Dixon and Kings Mill Hospital's Chief Executive, Richard Mitchell to a future Panel meeting to consider the successes achieved through multi-agency working during the pandemic</p>	<p>To be added to the Panel's Work Programme for a future meeting</p>

Following the discussion, the Chairman summarised the views, comments and suggestions arising from the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution. He asked Members to acknowledge that the work programme would remain fluid to enable the Panel to respond and prioritise issues as they arose over the coming months and all present concurred with that course of action.

RESOLVED that

- a) the Council's initial response to the pandemic including the consequential impacts to the Council, the local economy, and its communities as outlined in the report, be received and noted;
- b) the following initial work programme for the Panel be approved to facilitate delivery of the Panel's objectives in a timely and responsive manner:-

Date of Meeting:	Focus Theme:	Attendees:	Cabinet Update:
3 September 2020	Local Recovery Themes Update and The Peoples' Memorial	All Service Directors	15 September 2020
6 October 2020	Small Business and High Street Recovery	Local Business Representatives	13 October 2020
5 November 2020	Multi-Agency Working	Police, NHS, Charities, Discover Ashfield, County Council	1 December 2020
10 December 2020	TBC	TBC	20 January 2020

- c) the Council's Corporate Leadership Team be invited to attend the next Panel meeting in September 2020 to brief Members on their designated area of COVID-19 response and recovery;
- d) an item be placed on the agenda for the Panel meeting scheduled for 3 September 2020, to enable Members to consider in more detail the suggestions for a memorial to commemorate and honour the unstinting commitment and bravery shown by all key workers and volunteers during the pandemic;
- e) Chief Inspector Mark Dixon and Kings Mill Hospital's Chief Executive, Richard Mitchell, be invited to a future Panel meeting to consider the successes achieved through multi-agency working during the pandemic.

The meeting closed at 8.23 pm

Chairman.