

## **COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY SCRUTINY PANEL**

**Meeting held on Thursday, 3rd September, 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:** Craig Bonar, Carol Cooper-Smith, Ruth Dennis,  
Theresa Hodgkinson, Peter Hudson, Mike Joy,  
Paul Parkinson and Shane Wright.

**In Attendance:** Councillor John Wilmott.

### **CP.3 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests**

No declarations of interest were made.

### **CP.4 Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 30 July 2020, be received  
and approved as a correct record.

### **CP.5 COVID-19 Response and Recovery - Directorate Updates**

The Chairman welcomed everyone present to the second meeting of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel, including all members of the Council's Corporate Leadership Team and the Chief Executive. The Chairman commented that such attendance proved testament to the importance the Council had placed on the work of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Panel.

The Chairman reminded Members of the previous meeting of the Panel, at which the establishment of a work programme was approved setting out the Panel's meeting dates for the remainder of 2020 along with the focus theme of each upcoming meeting:

<b>Meeting Date</b>	<b>Meeting Theme</b>	<b>Attendees</b>	<b>Cabinet Update</b>
3 September 2020	Local Recovery Themes	Corporate Leadership Team	15 September 2020

6 October 2020	Small Business and High Street Recovery/Local Government Reorganisation	Local Business Representatives/CLT	13 October 2020
5 November 2020	Multi-agency Working	Police, NHS, Charities, County Council	1 December 2020
10 December 2020	TBC	TBC	20 January 2020

As set out within the work programme, the focus of the Panel at this meeting would be local recovery themes in discussion with the Corporate Leadership Team.

The Vice Chairman provided Members with an update regarding the 'Key Worker Memorial' identified as a priority at the first meeting of the Panel. Reiterating sentiments from the previous meeting, the Vice Chairman reminded Members that the memorial would be aimed at all key workers and volunteers, not strictly NHS workers. The early stages of exploring work required to support the development of a permanent memorial took place through initial meetings held with Council Officers to discuss funding, location, and opportunities for partnership working.

The Vice Chairman assured Members that meetings regarding the memorial would continue over the coming weeks to establish the appropriate steps to be made, with updates to be provided to the Panel.

The Chairman then invited the Chief Executive to address the Panel with an overview of the Council's position during the immediate response to the pandemic.

The Chief Executive commented on the difficulty of summarising the past six months through unprecedented times for communities, organisationally, and nationally. The Council quickly identified the primary consideration during the pandemic – the impact on the people of Ashfield. It was established that the Council would focus on maintaining vital services throughout the crisis, and through working as 'one council' this was achieved.

Employees were quickly redeployed to areas most in need, with over a hundred volunteers within the Council. Staff had been exceptional during this period, going above and beyond to work outside of comfort zones to deliver essential services.

New working conditions had also been embedded that would have a lasting effect on the organisational culture of the Council moving forward. Council Offices remained open for employees that needed to come in with social distancing measures quickly implemented, such as one-way systems, clear signage, and hand sanitising stations. Thanks were also extended to Members for the support they have offered throughout the crisis.

The Council led on delivering humanitarian aid in Ashfield, such as delivering food parcels and prescriptions and making welfare telephone calls. Close work with the community and voluntary sectors proved a lifeline for communities in Ashfield and the Council was thankful for this strong collaboration.

Going forward, the Council would continue to offer support wherever it could. Strong collaboration with local service providers would continue as the emphasis shifted from response to local outbreak control. Services continued to move forward, and lessons of the pandemic would shape priorities.

Finally, the Chief Executive, on behalf of the Corporate Leadership Team, affirmed the value of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel, both as a platform to assess the Council's pandemic response and to understand the impact it would have in years to come.

Following the introductory speech from the Chief Executive, the meeting followed a question and answer format, featuring discussions between Panel Members and the Officers in attendance, as well as numerous questions that had been submitted through social media by Ashfield residents.

The following denotes who responded to the questions asked:

**CE** – Chief Executive

**DL&G** – Director of Legal and Governance

**DR&BT** – Director of Resources and Business Transformation

**DP&C** – Director of Place and Communities

**DH&A** – Director of Housing and Assets

**CFM** – Corporate Finance Manager

Question/Comment:	Response:
<p><b>Chairman:</b> What preparations have been made for a potential second wave of the virus?</p>	<p><b>CE:</b> In the event of a second wave, the Council has much more intelligence regarding the virus and how to react to it compared to the initial outbreak in March; such as knowing the most vulnerable residents in Ashfield. An early warning system is in place from the Director of Public Health with weekly briefings including figures for the whole of Nottinghamshire. The Council has recently appointed Economic Development Officers within an established Business Support Hub to offer guidance to local businesses regarding available support and COVID-secure measures. The Council is aware that outbreaks can happen in a variety of settings and will be examining figures as they arrive to take appropriate steps. The Council's Communications Team will be commencing an autumn campaign regarding COVID-19 awareness. Collaborative working will continue to be a key feature of the recovery phase and the Council is working with the voluntary and community sectors to prepare for a second wave. Finally, the Council will rely on the digital relationship with residents to ensure messages can be delivered efficiently.</p>

<p><b>Vice Chairman:</b> Both the voluntary and community sectors were heavily involved during the initial response; will this be maintained during the recovery phase?</p>	<p><b>CE:</b> Collaboration with the voluntary and community sector has been strong throughout and has led to a stronger relationship between the Council and the sectors both strategically and operationally.</p>
<p><b>Cllr K Rostance:</b> How will the Council support residents with significant circumstance changes and lost jobs?</p>	<p><b>CE:</b> There are concerns regarding the end of schemes that have helped reduce job losses and financial hardship. The Council is working with the DWP to ensure preparations are in place for the end of these schemes. Efforts will be made to refer residents to the most appropriate agencies that can help with issues outside of the Council's remit.</p> <p><b>DP&amp;C:</b> There is awareness that many people could lose jobs in Ashfield, and the Council is working to identify how best to support them. A piece of work has been commissioned that will concentrate on the economic recovery of Ashfield, identifying areas that need to be focused on. Additionally, there has been investment in the Economic Development Team to enable the Council to provide further support to residents and businesses.</p> <p><b>DR&amp;BT:</b> The effects of the pandemic on employment particularly devastating for young people. The Government have launched the Kickstart Scheme, designed to provide funding to employers to create job placements for 16 to 24 year olds. The Council will be working with the DWP to support this scheme.</p>

Following initial questions, the Chairman introduced the Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services to provide Members with an overview of the information contained in the report.

Members were presented with a report including up-to-date guidance from Central Government regarding COVID-19 and details of Local Outbreak Control Plans.

Government announced that as part of the national strategy to reduce the infection rates of COVID-19, it would expect every area in England to create a Local Outbreak Control Plan. The Nottinghamshire Local Outbreak Plan set out how local government works with the NHS Test and Trace service, so that the County would be prepared to contain the virus wherever and if ever it occurs. The Plan also outlined how lives would be protected using emergency response systems in partnership with Public Health England, the NHS, the voluntary sector, and the wider community.

The report also presented Panel Members with updates provided by members of the Corporate Leadership Team relating to the Council's Directorates and COVID-19 specific recovery themes.

The Chairman put forward questions that had been submitted by Ashfield residents through social media.

Question/Comment:	Response:
<p>Many thanks to Ashfield District Council for the support offered during this crisis. What ongoing support will be provided to local businesses?</p>	<p><b>DP&amp;C:</b> The Council has carried out a vast amount of work ensuring grants are delivered to support businesses in the District, and the Council will continue to work with and support local business. Measures such as the free parking scheme have been successful and well received by both customers and traders. The Business Support Hub has been established to serve as a contact hub for financial support and any other issues. The Council is also working to produce an Economic Recovery Plan to further understand the recovery landscape where to best use resources. Huge opportunities are still available through the Future High Streets and Town Funds.</p> <p><b>CFM:</b> The Council has allocated around £19 million in small business and retail hospitality grants. Recognition is there that some businesses are falling through the cracks of support and more work will be carried out to respond to this.</p>
<p>How much revenue did the Council lose by extending free parking?</p>	<p><b>CFM:</b> In total, forecast loss from car parking will be approximately £93,000 - £68,000 anticipated lost income due to free car parking, £25,000 based on the introduction of 2-hour free car parking from September to the end of the financial year.</p> <p><b>DP&amp;C:</b> Reiterated that feedback on the Council's free parking initiatives has been overwhelmingly positive, increasing shopper confidence to go into Town Centres, increasing footfall and enabling traders to continue trading. The introduction of a period of free parking has influenced the Council's thinking on future changes to parking.</p>
<p>What preparations have been made for a potential second wave, and what lessons have the Council learned?</p>	<p><b>DH&amp;A:</b> On lessons learnt, the relationship the Council has with the voluntary sector has greatly improved. Preparations for a second wave – the Council has temporary accommodation on standby.</p>

	<p><b>DR&amp;BT:</b> Biggest lesson learnt is how resilient the Council is and has been. Moving forward there will be an organisational culture change, work in different ways to be adopted and embedded. The Council will continue daily monitoring of the impact of COVID-19 on employees. Redeployment of employees will reoccur in the event of a second wave.</p> <p><b>DL&amp;G:</b> In the event of a second wave, structures are in place that leave the Council better prepared, such as the Local Resilience Forum and the Strategic Coordinating Group within that. These groups are focused on outbreak planning. The response to a potential second wave is being continually fine-tuned.</p>
Have Ashfield District Council employees been supplied appropriately with PPE?	<b>DR&amp;BT:</b> Daily monitoring of PPE began in March at the onset of the pandemic, with any issues identified and PPE distributed to areas of greatest need. The Council never ran out of PPE or were unable to provide appropriate PPE to employees.
Will the Council buildings be open to the public?	<b>DR&amp;BT:</b> Access to certain Council buildings will be available on an appointment only basis. Risk assessments will be carried out appropriately for the Council's office spaces. The priority will be to provide a safe environment for visitors and employees.

Following the discussion of questions submitted by Ashfield residents, the Chairman invited further questions from Panel Members.

Question/Comment:	Response:
<b>Cllr K Rostance:</b> There have been difficulties ensuring social distancing measures are adhered to in public houses. Has the Council's Licensing Team been able to maintain control of this?	<b>CE:</b> The Council has been and will continue to work collaboratively with pubs in the District. Licensing are working with the Police and meeting breweries to ensure measures are implemented to combat any lack of social distancing.
<b>Cllr D Shaw:</b> Has there been an upsurge in homelessness?	<b>DH&amp;A:</b> Homelessness referrals have reduced due to the imposed ban on evictions. Although it is difficult to know who is threatened with rough sleeping, The Council will continue working with key partners to monitor homelessness in the District. Known homeless are being housed in temporary accommodation and will be offered support. The Council continue to apply for grants to support temporary accommodation.

**Cllr C Wilkinson:** With the potential end of the eviction ban and furlough schemes, does the Council anticipate an influx of homelessness?

**DH&A:** The Council will try to accommodate families in collaboration with other housing providers. Officers will liaise with landlords and property developers to support a potential influx. The Council is aiming to increase the capacity of temporary accommodation available.

The Panel acknowledged the vast amount of work the Council had undertaken both in response to the pandemic and throughout the early stages of recovery, with thanks extended to the dedication of the Place and Wellbeing, Environmental Health, and Private Sector Enforcement Teams. The Panel recognised that these teams had done remarkable work ensuring businesses were aware of and complying with COVID-secure measures. Members discussed a potential recognition scheme for businesses that have gone above and beyond adapting to new guidelines, with the Director for Place and Communities in agreement.

The Panel also discussed the valuable work of charities throughout the crisis, with recognition given to the efforts of food banks in Ashfield. Members agreed with the sentiments put forward by the Chief Executive earlier in the meeting of collaborative working being a key priority throughout recovery. The Director of Place and Communities assured Members that the Community Engagement Team would continue working with the voluntary and charity sectors.

Discussion then moved to the topic of local government reorganisation, in accordance with the remit of the Panel set within the established terms of reference. The Vice Chairman requested an update on the Council's position regarding local government reorganisation.

The Director of Resources and Business Transformation explained to Members that the Council was awaiting the publication of a white paper from the Government regarding local government reorganisation, and that the Council's position would become much clearer following this.

The awaited white paper would outline plans for local government reorganisation including an increase in unitary authorities, empowering parish councils, mayoral requirements, and further devolution to unitary authorities. Communication with Nottinghamshire County Council and Government had been limited up to this point, but the Council would be undertaking considerable work to establish a position in response to the proposals.

Members agreed that an item relating to local government reorganisation, with any updates on the anticipated white paper and proposals within, would be placed on the agenda for the meeting scheduled for October.

Following the discussion, the Chairman and Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services summarised the views, comments, and suggestions arising from the meeting. The Chairman again reminded Members that the Panel's work programme would remain fluid to enable the Panel to respond and prioritise issues as they arise. On behalf of the Panel, the Chairman thanked the Corporate Leadership Team for their attendance and participation, noting that it demonstrates the importance the Council places on the work of the Panel.

RESOLVED that

- a) the updates provided by the Corporate Leadership Team relating to the Council's Directorates and COVID-19 specific recovery themes, as outlined in the report, be received and noted;
- b) an item be placed on the agenda for the Panel meeting scheduled for 6 October 2020 focusing on Small Business Recovery in Ashfield;
- c) the Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services be requested to extend invitations to business representatives from a variety of sectors and areas across the District to attend the next meeting of the Panel and participate in the discussion relating to Small Business Recovery;
- d) an item be placed on the agenda for the Panel meeting scheduled for 6 October 2020 to enable Members to consider in more detail the proposals for local government reorganisation.

The meeting closed at 8.32 pm

Chairman.