

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

CABINET

These minutes are draft until confirmed as a correct record at the next meeting.

Friday, 29th May, 2020

Present:

Councillor Dine Romero	Council Leader and Liberal Democrat Group Leader
Councillor Rob Appleyard	Cabinet Member for Adult Services
Councillor Tim Ball	Cabinet Member for Housing, Planning, and Economic Development
Councillor Neil Butters	Cabinet Member for Transport Services
Councillor Paul Crossley	Cabinet Member for Community Services
Councillor Kevin Guy	Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Councillor Richard Samuel	Deputy Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources
Councillor Sarah Warren	Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Neighbourhood Services
Councillor David Wood	Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Neighbourhood Services
Councillor Joanna Wright	Cabinet Member for Transport Services

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting by explaining that this meeting is being held under The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020. The Council has agreed a protocol to cover virtual meetings and this meeting will operate in line with that protocol. The meeting has the same status and validity as a meeting held in the Guildhall.

The Chair invited everyone to remember with a minute's silence all those who have lost their lives as a result of Coronavirus, and also in memory of two men who drowned in the River Avon on Thursday 28th May.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

At this point the Monitoring Officer issued a dispensation in relation to any Councillors that were in receipt of any grants that had been awarded by the government under the COVID-19 Regulations, such as business grants or furloughing, to allow all Members of the Cabinet to take part in the debate and invited any councillors that this applied to identify themselves.

Councillor David Wood declared a disclosable interest in agenda item 11 'Covid-19 Update report and position statement' as he was on furlough leave.

4 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

None.

5 QUESTIONS FROM PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

There were 12 questions from Councillors and 4 questions from members of the public.

[Copies of the questions and responses, including supplementary questions and responses if any, are available on the Council's website.]

6 STATEMENTS, DEPUTATIONS OR PETITIONS FROM PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS

David Redgewell sent a statement (*a copy of which is available on the Council's website*) where South West Transport Network and Railfuture Severnside have expressed their concerns about social distancing regulations within Bath and North East Somerset on the public transport network.

Councillor Neil Butters thanked David Redgewell for his statement and added that the Council had been in contact with WECA on issues raised in the statement.

7 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS CABINET MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 13th February 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

8 CONSIDERATION OF SINGLE MEMBER ITEMS REQUISITIONED TO CABINET

There were none.

9 MATTERS REFERRED BY POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY BODIES

There were none.

10 SINGLE MEMBER CABINET DECISIONS TAKEN SINCE PREVIOUS CABINET MEETING

The Cabinet agreed to note the report.

11 COVID19 - UPDATE REPORT AND POSITION STATEMENT

The Chair introduced this item by saying that it was important to share publicly what the Council's response has been to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Council has been busy making sure that there was a plan in place to address what was needed to be done by all Council services and our partners.

The Chair informed the meeting that the COVID-19 update report and position statements have been presented to the Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel, on Wednesday 27th May 2020.

The Chair read out the summary report of the comments and recommendations made by the Corporate PDS Panel.

(A summary of the Panel's findings has been placed on the Minute book as Appendix 3 and are available on the Council's website).

The Chair thanked the Corporate PDS Panel for their comments and invited Will Godfrey (Chief Executive) to take the meeting through the report.

Will Godfrey said that it was important to recognise that the Council have been through some extraordinary set of circumstances which have required adoption of practices from middle of March, where everyone had to adapt and adopt to different ways of working.

The emergency was formally declared on 23rd March 2020 (by the Chief Executive). It was important to recognise that this Cabinet meeting would mark the end of that process in the sense of establishing all of the democratic processes and ensure full accountability for all of the decisions that have been taken during and since that time. Will Godfrey also said that the Council have been transparent about what has been happening during that period making sure that there were regular communications with every resident.

In the early parts of the Declaration of the Emergency, the Council was focused on issues around public health in particular (for instance, closing down the play areas to manage social distancing; temporary closure of the heritage sites and a number of other similar measures). The Compassionate Communities Hub was established to try to assist people who were shielding, and to provide a facility for those most vulnerable.

At the same time, from the Council's organisational perspective, a lot has changed. The Council had around 1,500 people working from home with interactions on Skype, Zoom and similar.

Will Godfrey took the Cabinet through the rest of the report by highlighting help to businesses and that the Council was now in the middle of the COVID-19 situation. Due to this unprecedented crisis, the Council would face huge financial challenges this year, and in years to come. The officers would continue to bring update reports to Cabinet and other Council meetings to ensure that everybody was aware on their ongoing work.

Will Godfrey reminded the Cabinet that the full COVID-19 financial recovery report would be presented to the Cabinet on 2nd July 2020.

The Chair thanked Will Godfrey for this summary and invited each member of the Cabinet to comment on Council's response to COVID-19.

Councillor Sarah Warren started her comments by expressing her sympathy for all those who have suffered or lost loved ones as a result of the Coronavirus crisis, and to congratulate Council officers for the magnificent way that they have risen to the challenge at the initial phase of this crisis. The officers have been supporting vulnerable residents; businesses; collecting waste each week; taking difficult decisions whilst adapting to working from home and dealing with any personal

difficulties they may have had to face. Councillor Warren also said that she would be looking forward to working closely with officers to help focus the Council's own activities around the climate emergency going forward, and also to ensure a green recovery of the wider Bath and North East Somerset community, building on issues such as a reduction in traffic and increase in cycling and walking. Councillor Warren also said that the Council would be looking to rebuild around energy efficiency in existing and future buildings; renewables and in achieving Council's objectives expressed in climate emergency declaration last year of achieving net zero emissions by 2030.

Councillor Tim Ball said that these were unprecedented times for the residents. Council officers, as well as Councillors, have been working in a new environment. Councillor Ball thanked senior Council officers for their dedication in ensuring that the Council have continued to deliver services to its residents. Councillor Ball also thanked housing officers who worked hard to keep rough sleepers off the streets. The Council would make sure that those people with no housing would continue to move into more permanent accommodations and live more settled life in the future. Councillor Ball concluded his statement by inviting residents to get in touch with the Council and local Councillors in case of any issues that may have.

Councillor Kevin Guy agreed with the comments made earlier and expressed his sympathy to those people who have suffered recently. Councillor Guy also thanked to all officers who have worked extremely hard in the very difficult circumstances. Councillor Guy gave an assurance that schools would only be opening once the head teachers, the teachers themselves, the governing bodies and the Council were happy that it was safe to do so. It would be parents' choice whether they wish to send their children to school; however, Councillor Guy encouraged people to do so. There would be more difficult decisions made in the future when the government decides for the rest of students to go back to school, which would require joint working to ensure support for teachers and officers, and safe environment for our children.

Councillor Richard Samuel thanked Chief Executive and his team for the comprehensive report on what has been happening over the last few months. It was the biggest shock/change to this Council in its existence, with impacts that would be felt over many years to come. The Council teams have engaged with the business community in getting the grants and money to businesses, which was followed up with the discretionary scheme launched on Wednesday 27th May, to give a further couple of million pounds to businesses that fell outside the government's original scheme. Councillor Samuel expressed his concern that the money provided by the government for business continuity was just a 'bridge', and not a long-term solution. Councillor Samuel thanked waste and cleansing staff who kept their services running well under difficult circumstances.

Councillor Richard Samuel also drew Cabinet's attention to the massive economic shock that COVID-19 would create not just for the local community, but also to the Council. There was an estimate of £50m of deficit in Council's budget for the end of this financial year. The money received from the central government has reduced that deficit, but that amount would go nowhere near meeting the challenge that this Council would face. Councillor Samuel added that this was quite a serious position for the Council and urged local MPs and national politicians to listen what local governments across the country have to say in terms of the crisis on a local level. The Cabinet would receive a report for the meeting on 2nd July setting out how the

Council would intend to achieve financial recovery and stability for the remainder of this financial year. The Council would not be able to meet the estimated deficit from its reserves, and unless the central government steps in to reduce that deficit, the Council would experience monumental financial challenge. Councillor Samuel concluded by inviting the Council's Scrutiny Panels to look at the plans and report coming before the Cabinet in July this year, and contribute with their views, proposals, suggestions and recommendations on the financial case.

Councillor Rob Appleyard highlighted the huge amount of work which was done by Council officers in the last few months within Adult and Social Services. Not only work done by officers from the Council, but also hard work from partner organisations such as the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Virgin Care. Those organisations, along with the Council, have maintained connection with the most vulnerable people in the area whilst also looking at different ways of providing essential services to all residents. Councillor Appleyard highlighted the setup of the Community Compassionate Hub, which has happened in a week or two after the emergency was declared, and the significant work of the volunteers in helping those in need in number of ways (i.e. food parcel delivery, prescription collection, running errands, etc). Councillor Appleyard also praised the services from the Royal United Hospital in Bath. Councillor Appleyard concluded his statement by thanking the community for following the COVID-19 social distancing guidelines, and with that putting less pressure on the Council, NHS and other partner organisations.

Councillor David Wood also thanked the officers for an amazing work they did during the most extraordinary circumstances, probably the most challenging times of their professional careers. Councillor Wood highlighted the work of the waste and recycling services during this time, especially when some of the staff members had to be away due to Coronavirus. Councillor Wood also thanked the staff from the frontline services who performed well above and beyond the usual, and also to the public who were incredibly supportive of Council's waste and collection teams. Councillor Wood concluded by informing the meeting that the recycling centres would start re-opening and invited the public for sensible behaviour at those centres which were expected to be re-open next week.

Councillor Paul Crossley thanked all residents of Bath and North East Somerset for being responsive during the crisis in terms of the lockdown rules. People have helped their neighbours, looked after elderly and also helped those vulnerable - the community got together. Councillor Crossley thanked all officers of the Council for their hard work during the unprecedented circumstances. Councillor Crossley particularly highlighted the work of Council's library staff, especially the way they made a range of products and innovations available to people across the authority. Unfortunately, this was mostly web based so it excluded people who do not have internet at home; nevertheless, it has brought new people to library services who were now looking at different ways of engaging with library facilities. Councillor Crossley also thanked Parks department who have done great work during extremely difficult circumstances, and Heritage services who would have a tremendous amount of work to implement social distancing measures in museums and other places of interest.

Councillor Neil Butters also thanked the officers of the Council for their hard work, and to the residents for following the lockdown guidelines. Councillor Butters also said that Transport, Highways and Emergency Planning have successfully continued with the provision of services to residents during these difficult times. Councillor

Butters also said that bus and train users would face another reality in terms of their journeys built around social distancing measures. The Council have been working closely with the First buses and Great Western rail services in terms of the safe travel of their residents.

Councillor Joanna Wright commented that it was quite clear that we would have to adapt to 'new normal'. The recovery of the whole community would be a challenge which would require everyone to work together. The public transport would not be available in the same way it was before; there would be less passenger on the bus due to social distancing measures. However, that should not encourage people to increase usage of private cars. The Council would be working together with public transport providers and residents into looking at the best solutions for travel and for continuing encouraging people to cycle and walk to work, as much as they can. Councillor Wright also said that central government should help the Council in terms of free bicycle provision for key workers and thanked all the officers for the number of hours that they have put in providing services to the community.

Councillor Dine Romero thanked everyone and said that she has fully supported what was said by her Cabinet Members today. There was a need to focus on the future, and to look at what has happened during the crisis that worked really well, in particular around partnership working with the voluntary groups, and also with Virgin Care. Councillor Romero highlighted the improvement of air quality since the lockdown started, in particular down to having less cars on the roads.

Councillor Romero commented that the Council would need to make sure that businesses should not only recover, but also recover in a way around commitments to climate emergency.

Councillor Romero also said that the Council would review planning policies to make sure that future decisions could be taken within a strong framework of coordinated policies.

Councillor Romero concluded her statement by saying that there have been several new processes and number of new ways of working. Not everything has been perfect, but the Council has been transparent with regular communications to residents. The Council would to continue to work with the residents and community leaders for a better tomorrow.

Decision:

The Cabinet (UNANIMOUSLY) agreed to:

- 2.1 Note the report on the Council response to COVID -19 pandemic
- 2.2 Consider the comments and feedback from the Corporate Scrutiny Panel meeting on 27th May.

Corporate PDS Meeting Summary

The meeting ended at 3.20 pm

Chair _____

Date Confirmed and Signed _____

Prepared by Democratic Services