

MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Full Committee Meeting available virtually on https://barnsley.public-i.tv/
DATE:	Tuesday, 12 May 2020
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	HELD VIRTUALLY

MINUTES

Present

Councillors Ennis OBE (Chair), Carr, Gollick, Higginbottom, Hunt, Lodge, Lofts, Makinson, Sumner, Tattersall and Wilson.

20 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

No apologies were received from Ms G. Carter in accordance with Regulation 7(6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

21 Declarations of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interest

Councillors Makinson and Tattersall each declared a non-pecuniary interest in minute number 23 due to their positions on the board of Berneslai Homes.

22 Minutes of the Previous Meetings

RESOLVED that the minutes of the following meetings be approved as a true and correct record:

Full Committee meeting held on 7th January, 2020;

Thriving and Vibrant Economy Workstream meeting held on 4th February, 2020;

People Achieving Their Potential Workstream meeting held on 10th March, 2020.

23 Covid-19 Response

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:-

Cllr Sir Steve Houghton, Leader

Sarah Norman, Chief Executive

Julia Burrows, Director of Public Health.

A presentation was provided to Members which highlighted the following points:-

There had been 174 Covid-19 related absences, with 163 of these due to staff self-isolating but unable to work and 11 with confirmed or suspected Covid-19. There were no concerns around absence. As with most areas, there had been issues with the supply of PPE and this challenge remained.

Patient flow from hospital and capacity in residential care did not present any issues. Nearly 2,100 tests for Covid-19 had been undertaken, but this did not include any figures for testing of residents done by Public Health England.

A bereavement support service had been commissioned with 31 already taking advantage of this. Health and wellbeing remained a priority and information on this subject had been regularly circulated to staff, Councillors and to residents.

The Emergency Response Contact Centre had received almost 2,500 calls as of 11th May, and demand was currently able to be met. 63,000 letters were in the process of being distributed to vulnerable residents with those most vulnerable being prioritised. Where no contact could be made, this would be followed up by telephone, and in person if required.

Work continued with children known to social care with contact being maintained often via the use of technology, and statutory timescales being met as a minimum. Schools and early years settings were being supported to remain open to key workers and young people considered vulnerable, however numbers of the latter attending were not as high as would be ideal.

In relation to critical frontline services, crematorium, mortuary and funeral capacity was adequate and there were no areas of concern.

Green waste collection had been paused, but all other waste continued to be collected, with arisings around 20% above that seen at the same time last year. Household Waste Recycling Centres had recently reopened, which had gone well, with social distancing being observed.

Essential highways safety work continued, as did emergency repairs to Berneslai Homes property, however routine maintenance had paused.

£38.15m of grants had been distributed to almost 3,500 businesses, with nearly 1,200 enquiries received by Enterprising Barnsley. Regulatory Services had been working with Enterprising Barnsley to support businesses with their reopening in line with advice as lockdown eased. The Employment Support Helpdesk dealt with 46 enquiries on issues such as benefit claims, and support for those in furlough.

An economic assessment had been commissioned in order to understand the impact on businesses and retail in more detail.

With regards to the financial position, it was noted that the Council had increased costs and a loss of income. The current estimate was that total costs were in the region of £40m with £15m being received from Government. This left a net cost of £25m to the authority.

A strategy for recovery and renewal is in place, which will focus around the following 5 areas; Health and Wellbeing, Business and Economy; Building Resilience; Education and Attainment; and Environment and Infrastructure.

Thanks were given to the work of all staff in the current situation, and the need for ongoing change was acknowledged, given the impact of Covid-19 would be seen over the longer term.

Questions were invited and challenge provided from Members. In the ensuing discussion the following points were noted:-

In relation to the questions about whether Area Teams could have coordinated community responders sooner, Members heard how initial efforts concentrated on those most vulnerable who were on the shielding list. Area Teams had assisted in the mapping of support in each area. Unsure of demand, decisions were made for responders to prioritise those on the shielding list in the first instance. As the situation progressed and anticipated demand was known, a shift was made to make more widespread use of community responders. It was acknowledged that there would always be lessons learned, and the Area Teams played a crucial role in assessing the impact locally of Covid-19 and would be important in the recovery phase.

In relation to support for communities in Barnsley such as Worsborough that had been highlighted as one of the most at-risk post Covid-19, Members heard that issues faced in this community were seen in areas throughout the borough. Recovery presented a challenge and it was noted that the economy was a key focus in the recovery plan. The Council was working with Sheffield City Region to plan for recovery on a county wide basis, with Government indicating that they wish for economic issues to be considered at this geography. However, there will be a Barnsley wide plan that feeds into sub-regional plans, and Members were reminded of the economic impact assessment commissioned to inform this. The role of Area Councils in delivery at a more local level was also acknowledged.

Noted was the unclear situation in relation to finance from Government and Members heard of lobbying taking place to make the case for shortfalls to be addressed, and additional resources to aid recovery.

Members questioned what the challenges in relation to children and education were, and those present heard that services remain operational, with statutory processes for those most vulnerable being delivered. Visits and reviews had been undertaken, with these taking place virtually where possible, and meetings such as the Fostering Panel and Adoption Panel had been also continued.

In relation to support for the workforce, Members were reminded of the daily bulletin for staff and Councillors which highlighted support for staying well at home. This included e-learning modules and advice on healthy lifestyles. The 'Well at work' intranet site was accessible and counselling support was still available through Occupational Health, with this being provided virtually.

The importance of ensuring staff health had been stressed with Managers asked to keep in touch with their staff daily. In addition, a Wellbeing Pulse Survey had been conducted to further understand the stresses and strains faced by staff and Councillors.

In relation to the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on men and on those from more deprived areas nationally, it was noted that very detailed information was not available for Barnsley but only just over half of deaths in the borough were male. Almost 75% of deaths were seen in those aged over 75 and with long term health

issues. It was noted that all health issues impacted disproportionately on those with health problems and those from deprived areas.

In relation to concerns about contact tracing, it was noted that phone apps will play a part in this, but much of this will be human focused. Though current arrangements suggested much of this may be done nationally, Directors of Public health were keen to shape how this may happen locally.

With reference to concerns about Covid-19 in care homes, Members heard how approximately 75% of care homes in Barnsley were Covid-19 free, and that 2/3rd of deaths in Barnsley were in hospital with just under 1/3rd in care homes. Work had been undertaken with the residential care sector to ensure adequate supplies of PPE and their appropriate use. Training in infection control had also been provided. Financial support had been made available to ensure resilience with staffing support also provided where necessary. Whilst support had also been provided for those providing domiciliary care, Members heard that the challenge had not been as great as that seen in care homes.

In relation to discharge from hospital, tests were undertaken to ensure those discharged were free of Covid-19 and efforts were made to ensure patients were discharged to homes without the infection.

With regards to testing for care workers, Members noted that after some time a system that works well was finally in place. Care workers could go to the testing facility at the hospital or could telephone for a testing kit to be posted to them.

Concerns were raised about the school meals voucher scheme, and assurances were given that the issues previously seen with the system had now been resolved and it was working well for Barnsley parents.

When questioned about the main challenges going forward, it was acknowledged that this was different from a crisis event such as flooding and would be ongoing for the immediate and medium-term future. It was acknowledged that delivering public services effectively in this period and managing public expectations would be challenging. Working to drive forward recovery considering the financial situation and weak local economy also presented a significant challenge.

Members also heard how it would be imperative to retain some of the benefits seen such as the time saved and reduction in traffic from holding virtual meetings. It was also hoped some of the strengths such as an increase in neighbourhood support, and the numbers volunteering could be maintained.

Noting issues with public transport, active travel was discussed and though details of a £250m Emergency Travel Fund were unclear, it was an area that would be explored. Members also noted that discussions were also taking place with SYPTTE to reopen the Active Travel Hub.

In relation to the impact of Covid-19 on the Glassworks scheme it was noted that a detailed report would be considered by Cabinet at the end of the month. Due to social distancing measures, there had been delays to construction. There was a

potential impact on leasing and discussions were taking place with tenants, with preliminary feedback positive.

In relation to the support for businesses and ensuring compliance, key advice was available on the Enterprising Barnsley website and Regulatory Services had been proactive in contacting food premises who had diversified to provide a takeaway service. Where the public had concerns, businesses had been contacted and advice given, which had generally been welcomed with additional action only taken twice.

Members questioned the impact of schools such as Horizon not being open, it was noted that since Easter it had reopened with a small number of students now attending. Assurances were provided that the Council worked closely with all schools through Barnsley Alliance to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable children were met.

The need to understand the impact of children being taught at home, rather than school, was acknowledged with this forming a key part of the impact assessment and work undertaken with Barnsley Schools Alliance. Anecdotally it was suggested those adversely affected could include children of families working from home with little spare time, as well as those without access to online learning, though ASOS had supported the latter with donated laptops.

In relation to the restoration of other formal Council meetings, Members noted that there were plans for the Annual Council to take place in October. It was proposed that the Mayor would be elected to office for the following 18 months. Plans were also in place to reinstate the Area Councils over the course of the next few weeks.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) That thanks be given for the presentation and responses to questions.
- (ii) That Members be kept informed of the outcome of the impact assessment work and the development of recovery plans going forward.

Chair