

MEETING:	Dearne Area Council
DATE:	Monday, 8 June 2020
TIME:	10.00 am
VENUE:	THIS MEETING WILL BE HELD VIRTUALLY

MINUTES

Present Councillors Noble (Chair), Danforth, Gardiner, C. Johnson and Phillips

42 Declarations of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of pecuniary or non-pecuniary interests.

43 Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

44 Minutes of the Previous Meeting of Dearne Area Council held on 16th March, 2020

The meeting received the minutes from the previous meeting of Dearne Area Council.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Dearne Area Council meeting held on 16th March, 2020 be approved as a true and correct record.

45 Covid-19 Presentation

David Robinson, Service Director Customer Information and Digital Services, Phil Hollingsworth, Service Director Stronger, Safer and Healthier Communities and Claire Dawson, Dearne Area Council Manager were welcomed to the meeting to present the item.

An overview of the strategic approach was provided, acknowledging that Covid-19 was different to previous incidents due the scale, scope, and complexity of the pandemic.

However, the situation also offered opportunities to realign values, strengthen relationships with partners, restart and realign priorities to create a new normal. Members heard how the Government had drafted a recovery and renewal strategy, and one was in development at a South Yorkshire level. Barnsley plans would align and be complementary. It was noted future plans needed to be agile and iterative, in order to respond to the need for services to be turned on and off in relation to further peaks. It was also noted that responses would be different depending on the needs of particular groups of people, including those shielding.

Three horizons were considered – h1 immediate recovery steps; h2 post-peak recovery steps; and h3 realising the recovery objectives. It was suggested that Barnsley was moving into h2 with lockdown being lifted. This was a period of innovation and that positives from the pandemic such as the ability to work more remotely, and to be more active, needed to be retained. As Barnsley moves forward, the h3 horizon will be the future that we want with the outcomes Barnsley desires, and objectives are being set to achieve this.

Members heard how the Council's draft recovery/renewal strategy encompassed 5 points; Humanitarian – Health and Wellbeing; Business Economy; Building Resilience; Education and Attainment; and Infrastructure and the Environment. It was recognised that all of which needed to be underpinned by the financial stability of the Council.

Members heard of the steps being undertaken to develop and implement the strategy, including conducting impact analysis, considering what services need to be restarted, maintained, or discontinued, and noted the need to monitor, learn and be adaptive going forward.

In considering the role of Area Councils, the valuable contribution they played in responding to the crisis was acknowledged. This included the flexing of commissioned services, the refocusing of community organisations was, and supporting the emergence of new groups. Members heard of the important role that Area Councils and the community as a whole would play in assisting recovery.

Members noted that, in light of the current financial situation, the Council was reviewing all budgets and service areas to ensure they remained relevant in relation to Covid-19 and recovery efforts. Members were reminded of the cessation of all non-essential expenditure earlier in the year.

For the Area Council, the overall budget remained unaltered for 2020/21, but it was suggested that there was a need to review priorities and commissioning intentions to ensure that they were still relevant.

Those present heard of the anticipated challenges ahead, which included poverty and worklessness; schooling and education; mental health and emotional wellbeing; re-establishing the fabric of society; and impacts on health and wellbeing from a reduced accessing of services.

It was noted that the Council's strategic direction such as in relation to digital, an inclusive economy and Zero40 remained relevant. It was also suggested that the pandemic had offered opportunities, with agile working potentially supporting more district centres, the establishment of support networks in the communities, and it had offered a greater insight into those who are most vulnerable in communities.

Members were reminded of the guidance issued in relation to Ward Alliance Funds, and that the base budget of £10,000 per ward would remain but plans for an additional £10,000 had been paused due to the current financial situation. It was emphasised that Ward Alliance expenditure should support recovery efforts, with the only exception being where finance had already been approved and local businesses had committed resources.

Although there had been an interest in re-establishing community events, it was acknowledged that this was not appropriate in the current climate, but the position would be reviewed for 2021/22.

Members noted the previous requirement to match 50% of the Ward Alliance Funds budgets with external finance or volunteer time, and that this would be difficult to achieve and would therefore be relaxed for the current financial year.

An update was provided in relation to the provision of grass cutting, which had been impacted on from prioritising domestic waste collection. It was noted that that this would now recommence, with the backlog being addressed in due course. In addition, it was noted that the collection of domestic green waste was due to recommence on 9th June.

In relation to the work of the Area Team, Members heard that the team had been mapping the support available in the area, and promoting this to residents, alongside boroughwide initiatives. Additional support had been provided to help the distribution of wellbeing boxes and Easter eggs that had been donated.

Support had been provided to the emergency contact centre, with the team being assisted to deliver 3,000 postcards. Also supported was the initiative to produce face coverings. 79 individuals had sewed approximately 2,200 face coverings which had been distributed throughout the borough.

Assistance had been provided to Community Responders, with Area Teams working with Barnsley CVS in order to coordinate training. 10 Responders had been engaged in the area, responding to 36 requests for support. 21 requests had been for shopping with 15 for befriending. A number of those requesting support required this on an ongoing basis, and complex cases had been referred to more suitable services for support.

Contracts held by the Area Council had been flexed, with B:Friend providing support to 76 older people via telephone and social media. Food parcels and wellbeing packs had also been provided.

Twiggs Grounds Maintenance had been supporting the work of Neighbourhood Services litter picking and cleaning targeted areas. Support had also been offered to community groups.

DECV continued to support 23 learners online with 3 gaining employment recently. The Housing Officer continued their work, reporting issues with waste, such as contaminated bins, flytipping and also addressed issues of disrepair.

Welfare advice services provided by DIAL and CAB had moved online and were also able to be accessed via telephone. All other face to face work funded through the Dearne Development Fund had ceased.

Members were provided an overview of all contracts, including associated costs and when they were due to end.

Approximately £28,000 remained for allocation, though it was acknowledged that no finance had been devolved to the Dearne Development Fund, which had previously provided financial support to CAB and DIAL.

46 Discussion: reflections on the presentation and how the Area Council can assist our communities in recovery

Members were reminded of the five strategic priorities. They were asked to consider whether the priorities of the Area Council aligned and whether services could continue, perhaps amended. In addition, Members were asked to highlight what might not align and may need to cease, or where there may be gaps that would require addressing.

The issue of business closure and associated unemployment was raised, and the expectation that this situation could worsen. The need to provide further support to residents through DIAL and CAB services was suggested.

Those present discussed the need for up to date data, including Universal Credit claimants, and support requested through Enterprise Barnsley, and existing support available. This would help Members to understand the issue in more detail, including whether the situation differed in the Dearne when compared to other areas.

RESOLVED That the availability of data and information on the impact of the pandemic be explored with a view to this informing further discussions on the subject.

47 Close of the meeting

The Chair declared the meeting closed.

Chair