

MEETING:	Central Area Council
DATE:	Tuesday, 9 June 2020
TIME:	10.00 am
VENUE:	THIS MEETING WILL BE HELD VIRTUALLY

MINUTES

Present

Councillors W. Johnson (Chair), P. Birkinshaw, Bruff, Carr, Clarke, Fielding, Gillis, Lodge and Williams

42. Commemoration

The Chair acknowledged the recent passing of Cllr Doug Birkinshaw, who was a valued member of the Area Council. Everyone was invited to take part in a minute silence in his memory.

43. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

He spoke of the recent retirement of the Central Area Council Manager Carol Brady, and gave thanks for her hard work, and her contribution to the Central Area.

Welcomed were Lisa Phelan and Sarah Blunkett, who would be replacing Carol. In addition Jonathon Banwell was welcomed as the new Senior Management Link Officer for the Area Council

44. Declaration of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

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

45. Minutes of the Previous Meeting of Central Area Council held on 9th March, 2020

The meeting received the minutes from the previous meeting of Central Area Council held on 9th March, 2020.

RECOMMENDED that the minutes of the Central Area Council held on 9th March, 2020 be approved as a true and correct record.

46. Covid-19 Presentation

David Robinson, Service Director Customer Information and Digital Services, Phil Hollingsworth, Service Director Stronger, Safer and Healthier Communities and Rachel Payling, Head of Stronger Communities, 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 to its length and ongoing impact. The recovery provided an opportunity for renewal and restart in some areas, and it was acknowledged that responses needed to be agile and adaptive due to the complicated nature of the situation.

The pandemic also offered opportunities to realign values, strengthen relationships with partners and create a new normal as restrictions begin to lift. 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 interactive 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. Moving forward interventions would need to be able to both respond to any peaks and enable recovery.

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 certain positives from the pandemic needed to be retained. As Barnsley moves forward, the h3 horizon provides the opportunity to define the objectives of recovery and the future wanted for the borough.

Members heard how the Council's draft recovery 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 noted the steps being undertaken to develop and implement the recovery strategy, including conducting impact analysis, giving consideration to what services need to be restarted, maintained, or discontinued, and monitoring, learning and being adaptive going forward. It was noted that plans required the contribution of a wide range of partners across Barnsley.

In considering the role of Area Councils, the valuable contribution they played in responding to the crisis through the flexing of commissioned services, and the refocusing of community organisations was acknowledged, as was the role they would play in assisting recovery.

Members noted that, in light of the current financial position, 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 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 was an interest in re-establishing community events, it was acknowledged that this was not appropriate in the current climate, but that this position would be reviewed for 2021/22.

Members noted the previous requirement for Ward Alliances to match 50% of their funds with external finance or volunteer time. It was recognised 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.

Members heard how initially the Central Area Team responded to the pandemic by mapping the support available in the area. These services were then supported and promoted by the team. In addition, support was also provided for the communication of more boroughwide messages. The team, assisted by officers and Councillors, distributed approximately 5,000 postcards in the area highlighting available support, specifically focusing on the most vulnerable.

Support was provided to implement the Community Responder service, which supported those who were vulnerable or shielding. A training package was developed and implemented with the support of Barnsley CVS, with 250 responders volunteering, and 445 requests for support across the borough.

Within the Central Area, 54 volunteers were engaged as Community Responders, with 110 requests for support. 57 of these were for assistance with shopping and 53 for befriending. Communities themselves also responded to the pandemic, with activity in each ward including support for those most vulnerable.

Members heard how the contracts held by the Area Council had been flexed in light of the pandemic. Twiggs Grounds Maintenance had been supporting Neighbourhood Services by cleaning areas, picking up litter and cutting grass. Support was also provided to maintain areas normally looked after by volunteers.

The contract delivered by the YMCA continued, but with support now provided through online means and through telephone calls.

All legal agreements had been signed for the successful projects to be delivered through the Youth Work Fund, with delivery commencing when safe to do so.

DIAL had flexed their arrangements to provide the service through telephone calls and online platforms, and Hope House had made arrangements to ensure their delivery was safe.

Members were reminded of the research being undertaken in relation to social isolation and it was suggested that this feeds into a working group prior to the next meeting of the Area Council.

District Enforcement had continued patrolling, providing a useful source of neighbourhood intelligence in relation to such as fly tipping, and ensuring play areas were secured and not being used.

The SLA to address fly-tipping in the area continued to provide support; working with residents and landlords, and investigating suspect vehicles carrying waste. It was noted that the contract was due to end in November and therefore decisions would be required about the future of the service in due course.

In relation to the service to support new tenants living in private sector rented accommodation, it was noted that 158 tenants had been identified prior to lockdown, with contact made with 35. The service was flexed to take account of Covid-19 and it was noted that this service also was due to end in November, 2020.

The perinatal service delivered by Family Lives had moved to engaging their client group via online means and by telephone. Families had been supported accessing food banks and food vouchers, with assistance provided in a variety of areas such as relationships, domestic abuse and accessing counselling.

Members were reminded of the current financial commitments of the Area Council which had 7 commissioned services and 3 grant funded projects. It was noted that there was an allocation for the celebration event, and this could be used when appropriate.

The services combined to deliver against the priorities of Environment; Health and Wellbeing; Community Safety; and Young People, and Members were reminded of the ongoing work to consider social isolation and the possibility of supporting voluntary youth club provision in the area.

47. Discussion: reflection on the presentation and how the Area Council can assist our communities in recovery

Members were reminded of the five strategic priorities and 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.

Questions were raised about the amount of finance available, the task involved, and whether it was feasible to address such issues at an area level. In response it was acknowledged that the Area Councils played a significant role in the response to the pandemic but that this was just one part of the response made by the whole of the Council. In addition, it was noted that the Council was not unique in its financial situation due to Covid-19 and alongside other Councils, representations were being made to Government.

The important role of Area Councils, with their intelligence at a local level and the ability to respond to their communities was acknowledged, meaning that Barnsley was better placed than some other areas in this respect.

Questions were raised about home working, and whether offices would be rationalised in order to reduce overall costs to the Council. It was noted that this was an area being considered. However, there were wider implications such as the loss of interaction and potential isolation to consider.

In relation to the cessation of non-essential spend, it was acknowledged that 'essential' could be subjective, and Members were encouraged to consider all expenditure in relation to the five strategic priorities.

A number of Members suggested that both the priorities and current financial commitments of the Area Council remained relevant and contributed to the overall strategic objectives. Suggestions were made to extend both Service Level Agreements.

Areas such as supporting businesses, and issues with access to food were highlighted as possible gaps, however it was suggested that the former may be being addressed through such as Enterprising Barnsley and the latter better considered by Ward Alliances. Holiday hunger programmes had been supported by a number of Ward Alliances, but consideration had to be given to whether similar could be undertaken at the current time.

The hard work of voluntary and community groups was noted and the need to ensure they were supported. Members noted that questionnaires were being sent to groups to understand the issues faced in order to consider how best to support these.

The need to support volunteers who had been unable to engage due to issues such as shielding, and also to encourage those who had decided to volunteer during the pandemic to continue was noted. Members heard how the volunteer coordinators network was considering how best to support clients as the borough moved from response to recovery.

Members commented on the increase in litter linked to the reopening of shops and takeaways, and the rise in dog fouling. The need to ensure District Enforcement recommence issuing Fixed Penalty Notices as soon as it is safe to do so was stressed.

Questions were raised about the devolving of Area Council finance to Ward Alliances, and it was noted that a decision had yet to be taken on this, but the Area Council could consider this at a future meeting.

With regards to the work to consider supporting voluntary youth provision, it was suggested that this could not be undertaken online and therefore may have to be postponed.

Members discussed how Ward Alliance Fund applications would be approved, given that Ward Alliances had ceased to meet. It was noted that processes were in place to consider applications without the need for a meeting, however ways to re-establish Ward Alliance meetings were being considered.

In order for further discussions to take place in advance of the next meeting of the Area Council it was suggested that a number of workshops be convened, with representation from each ward. The outcome of discussions would then feed into a future meeting of the Area Council.

RECOMMENDED:-

- (i) That a workshop be convened to consider the priorities of the Area Council and its contribution to the strategic priorities of the Council;
- (ii) That a workshop be convened to consider the research and other available intelligence in relation to social isolation in the Central Area.

48. Close of meeting

The Chair declared the meeting closed.

Chair