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SHOPSHIRE COUNCIL

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Virtual Meeting held on 20 May 2020
11.00 am - 1.15 pm

Responsible Officer: Julie Fildes
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Present

Councillor Claire Wild (Chair)
Councillors Joyce Barrow, Karen Calder, Roger Evans, Hannah Fraser, Alan Mosley, Cecilia Motley, Peggy Mullock, Dave Tremellen and Leslie Winwood

60 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

No apologies were received.

61 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None were declared.

62 Minutes of the meetings held on 29 January 2020 and 11 February 2020

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meetings held on 29th January and 11th February 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

63 Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

64 Member Question Time (Pages 37 - 40)

The Chair advised that three Member questions had been received. A copy of the report containing the detailed questions and their formal response is attached to the signed minutes.

- i) Received from Councillor R Evans in relation to the Financial Outturn report and the Recovery Plan being formulated in response to the pandemic. By way of a supplementary question Councillor Evans asked for confirmation that community leaders would be included in the development of recovery plans for town centres. The Acting Interim Chief Executive, Andy Begley, confirmed that this was already included in the process.
- ii) Received from Councillor R Evans in relation to the media report that the Government proposed to pass responsibility for care homes to local authorities and the responsibilities this would impose on the Authority. By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Evans asked whether the report on Radio Shropshire that the Government had requested that £4.6m of the Covid-19 additional funding allocation would be transferred to the Care homes

to meet additional expenditure. The Acting Interim Chief Executive, Andy Begley, responded that the Council was receiving regular guidance from Government on how the additional funds should be distributed. This advice was changing rapidly but the current requirement was for an allocation to be made to each care home based on the bed numbers. The precise amount of funding had not yet been advised.

- iii) Received from Councillor R Evans in relation to the pandemic's impact on school budgets and provision for additional expenditure to meet extraordinary costs. By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Evans asked if information on the amount of additional funding would be available to schools in time for their budget setting at the end of June. The Acting Interim Chief Executive, Karen Bradshaw, responded that this information had not been released by the Department of Education and the Council continued to press its representatives for it. She continued that the Council was working closely with schools and offering support and advice where required.

65 Covid-19 Supporting Communities and Community Response

The Acting Interim Chief Executive, Karen Bradshaw introduced the report, outlining the rapid response to the Covid-19 pandemic in the County. She referred Members to section 4.2 of the report which detailed the activities and interventions undertaken since the start of the crisis. Member noted that the Council had been recognised as a beacon of national good practice for its policy relating to providing accommodation and subsistence for the homeless in the county. Members noted that the Council was supporting the tremendous work of 539 community groups through the provision of funding and training.

In response to a Member's query on the identification of need in rural areas, the Health and Wellbeing Co-ordinator added that there were 189 identified grass root community groups supporting rural areas. She continued that some of the groups were struggling with the volume of calls for support and in these cases the Council was filling the gaps. The groups had been provided with the information they required to support people in their areas, with the emphasis on the provision of food. Food boxes had been distributed to residents required to shield as part of the National initiative and work was being undertaken with schools to identify families in receipt of free school meals and ensure that those families received provisions. Grant funding had been allocated to the Food Poverty Alliance to support the increase in demand for the services of food banks. She continued that it was recognised that there were more people in need and a list using various sources was being compiled in cooperation with other recognised stake holders, such as Housing Associations, to ensure that everyone with unmet need was identified and offered assistance.

The Director of Public Health added that this identification process of those with unmet needs involved complex data sets and included residents with both social and clinical needs. Members noted that a Power BI tool was being developed to show the location of volunteers so that they could be accessed by those who needed their assistance. The Health and Wellbeing Officer confirmed that it was available on the intranet but required more work before it was easily accessible on the intranet.

A Member observed that she had received mixed responses to requests for assistance for residents. The Acting Interim Chief Executive agreed that there had been inconsistencies in response in the early days of the crisis as processes were being developed and established. She continued that this had now been resolved as staff found routes to assist residents and the establishment of the dedicated Covid-19 response line. The Wellbeing Coordinator agreed to resend information to Members on the routes available to the community for support.

In reply to a Member's question, the Acting Interim Chief Executive, Andy Begley, confirmed that accommodation had been found for rough sleepers and homeless people in the County, and meals were being provided for those placed in accommodation without access to cooking facilities. He added that the Council faced the challenge of converting these temporary provisions to permanent accommodation.

In response to a Member's question regarding funding for the Covid-19 crisis, the Director of Finance Governance and Assurance explained that £89m of the £91m allocated to Shropshire by central government had already been allocated but a number of small businesses had not made the anticipated application for funds and were being contacted by Economic Development Officers and encouraged to apply.

Members discussed the impact of the crisis on town and parish councils and the loss of expected income and additional expenditure incurred. The Director of Finance, Governance and Assurance confirmed that central government had made no provision in the regulations for the additional crisis funding for discretionary grants to be made available to town and parish councils and had been prescriptive on how the funds could be allocated.

In response to a query regarding schools response to the Covid-19 crisis, the Interim Acting Chief Executive, Karen Bradshaw, suggested that as this was such a huge topic Members might be minded to consider this at a future meeting.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities, Place Planning and Regulatory Services reminded Members that the Community and Rural Strategy was under development and would be published shortly. He continued that the Covid-19 crisis had demonstrated the need for resilience in rural communities. The crisis had shown that the communities had resilience and that it was time to trust communities to take action to support themselves, especially as the Covid-19 crisis could be ongoing.

In response to a Member's question about available support for people with mental health needs and the allocation of sufficient resources available to meet these needs, the Director of Public Health observed that the provision of support had been recognised as a priority which would continue beyond the crisis. An initial investment had been made for groups impacted by the crisis which included bereavement support for children and young people. She continued that a huge amount of work had been undertaken with partner organisations including Telford and Wrekin Council, to develop accessible on-line support. The Leader echoed concerns regarding mental health issues in young people and suggested that new ways of

working with the NHS to support young people would be developed with changes to the way current services were being delivered.

Members recognised and noted the outstanding contribution of staff in developing the Covid-19 response in such a short period of time and extended the Committee's thanks.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and staff be thanked for their outstanding work.

66 Signs and Banners Task and Finish Group Final Report

The Chair of the Signs and Banners Task and Finish Group, Councillor Joyce Barrow, introduced the final report. Members noted that the group had considered a variety of street advertising types and related permits and had taken evidence from a wide range of people. The Chair of the Task and Finish Group stated that although she felt the group had produced a comprehensive report it had been completed before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and therefore she suggested that the recommendations of the group should be postponed until the crisis was over.

Councillor Andy Boddington was invited to speak. He observed that a policy for A boards was overdue and suggested that an effective policy should be in place before the recommendations were considered by Cabinet. He continued that the recommendations in the report appertaining the introduction of charges were not supported by a relevant policy. In the light of this, he suggested that the Task and Finish Group had not completed its work and it was unrealistic to delay the implication of charges for a further year to enable the policy to be developed.

Councillor Boddington continued that the implementation of charges for A boards were an unfair tax on businesses in Ludlow and the Task and Finish Group had not taken into account the unique circumstances of the town. Observing that A boards should add to the appearance of the street without creating clutter, it was important that traders had a clear understanding of what was expected of them in a difficult time for businesses.

Members responded that the report had not specified the type or positioning of A boards as this was felt to be a decision for individual Town and Parish Councils to suit their location, but the group had discussed concerns relating the proliferation of boards and the impact this had for less able pedestrians and the appearance of town centres.

Members concurred that the groups recommendations on charging should not be considered until the Covid-19 crisis was over and businesses were on a better financial footing and enforcement realistic. The Scrutiny Officer observed that the charging recommended in the report was based on the area taken up by the sign.

In response to a Members question regarding the policy for A boards in rural areas, the Chair of the Task and Finish Group observed that most A boards in rural areas

were placed within the curtilage of the property and were situated on private land. The recommendations only appertained to signage placed on public land.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities, Place Planning and Regulatory Services stated that he welcomed the Task and Finish Groups report and acknowledged that the work had been undertaken before the start of the pandemic. He continued that Economic Development Officers were working with traders to develop a raft of measures to assist their businesses through the Covid-19 crisis. New policies could not be fairly implemented until a sense of how town centres would appear after the pandemic. He continued that any costs imposed for licensing signage must be cost neutral to the Council and more work was required to establish this was the case for the charging recommendations made in the report. He continued that the recommendations made by the Task and Finish Group would be considered as part of the wider policy for the High Streets.

In response to a Member's question the Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the work of the Task and Finish Group had been completed and it had ceased to exist. He continued that the Committee could request to consider any policy developed as a result of its work.

RESOLVED:

- i) That the policy for banners, bunting and Christmas decorations be drafted, to include where appropriate, provisions for specific retail centres;
- ii) That a policy for A boards be set and actively enforced;
- iii) That the regulations contained in the body of this report be included in the policy for A boards;
- iv) That the total cost of administering and enforcing the scheme be reflected in the cost of an A board permit;
- v) That town and parish councils be consulted on supplementary policies for A boards for their local area;
- vi) That the intention to increase charges for pavement permits to a level that fully recovered the cost of administering and enforcing the scheme be not proceeded with and that these fees be subject to an annual review;
- vii) That an additional cost recovery fee of £200 on new and annual renewals of pavement permits be not proceed with; and
- viii) That the scheme of charges for the housing development sign permit scheme, be revised to a level that fully recovers the cost of administering and enforcing the scheme.

67 Future Work Programme

The Future Work Programme report was introduced by the Scrutiny Officer, who outlined the changes to the Scrutiny Committees due to the new working practices imposed by the Covid-19 crisis and the need to establish Task and Finish Groups to undertake significant scrutiny work.

Members noted that the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on schools should be added to the work programme.

A Member proposed that Climate Change was another important topic that was in danger of being lost due to overriding concerns of the pandemic. He suggested that the Committee should consider the Council's response to the climate emergency and its development of an Action plan.

The development of the Local Transport Plan was also suggested as a work programme item. The Scrutiny Officer responded that it was unlikely that the Local Transport Plan would be available for consideration before the end of the current year and suggested that the Road Safety Task and Finish Group may be minded to widen its remit to look at other road safety issues and road usage.

The Chair advised that limited time was available for meetings and it was anticipated that only two substantial items would be placed before the Committee for consideration at each meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on schools, and the Quarter 4 Performance and Finance reports be considered by the Committee at its June meeting; and that Highways and Climate Change be considered by the Committee at its July meeting.

Signed (Chairman)

Date:

Member Questions and Responses for PMSC 20th May 2010

1. Question from Councillor Roger Evans

I note in previous years the financial outturn of the council has been published during May. It is understood it will be delayed due to the current circumstances faced by the council. I note however no proposed date is yet shown on any forward plan. Can the date be given when we may see it please? I also note that there appears to be various comments and reports concerning Recovery Plans being put together and published by Councils. When will we be allowed to see, scrutinise and if needed comment on the Shropshire Recovery Plan.

Response:

The Financial Outturn Report 2019/20 will go to Cabinet on 15th June 2020.

To date we have been working through a framework of Silver and Gold Command groups during the first phase of C-19. These in turn have reported through to the Local Resilience Forum and the overarching Strategic Command Group for the region, which have been inclusive of Fire & Rescue, Police & Public Health colleagues as well as Chief Executives from Local Authorities. These groups are now shifting their focus onto the Recovery Phase, and are in the process of defining what that planning should include, what are the key objectives as a region / sector, and how effectively we can share and progress issues as we start to implement these plans.

As with other Councils, Shropshire Council has been moving to this next phase of work, and has been re-aligning the work of the Business Continuity Group and the sub-groups that sit below this. Through the Leadership Team we have been putting together a broad programme of activity (at this stage, identifying those high level activity headings), before we then develop the detail of specific areas of work. This will be an expansive programme of activity going forward and will include 'internal' business process and procedures for new ways of working, as well as how we deliver on the wider economic recovery objectives for Shropshire. Whilst there are a number of subgroups being developed to focus on specific areas of work, full engagement of local communities, and particularly the voluntary sector, will be essential – the involvement of local elected Members will be an integral part of this. The Leadership Team will share this proposed programme of activity informally as it develops, over the next few weeks, before presenting a confirmed programme of recovery activity formally to Cabinet.

2. Question from Councillor Roger Evans

It is reported that in various areas Local Authorities like Shropshire will now be taking over responsibility from government of all the Care Homes in their area. There are many comments of the good work Shropshire Council is doing in this area but what do these recent reports mean in practise. I do note that an extra £600m is being given to Local Authorities to pass onto Care Homes but what extras help and assistance will this council now be expected to take responsibility for.

Response:

Shropshire Council has been working proactively and positively with our Care Homes and system partners to provide support through the current crisis. In relation to extra responsibility and a share of National additional funding for care homes, Shropshire Council is required to identify all care homes in Shropshire eligible for the additional funding, identify the amount of funding each care home is entitled to and passport this funding to care homes.

Care Homes will still be independently responsible for their businesses and to ensure they maintain contractual requirements as monitored by Shropshire Council, and quality monitored by both Shropshire Council and the Care Quality Commission. Shropshire Council is working closely with colleagues in Health to ensure that care homes are well supported with both infection prevention and control processes and training through the Community Trust and receiving adequate GP support from named clinicians.

We are also responsible for coordinating testing in care homes across the County with the aim for these tests to be carried out by early June. In partnership with colleagues in Shrop Com we are delivering a process which will enable care home staff to be trained in carrying out testing within their homes to support their resilience and capacity for testing whenever it is needed going forward.

Shropshire Council will continue to support providers with access to emergency PPE when they are not able to access their usual supply chain through PPE provided by the Local Resilience Forum, but also using our own purchased stock of PPE where required. We will continue to provide regular support to providers, with any concerns they have through regular welfare calls via our Care Home Support Team, but also supporting them by advising on PPE procurement where they are struggling. We will continue to develop the new creative ways of working with individuals with care and support needs and build on what has already been achieved by doing things differently.

In regards payments to date - We have been able to give front line care provider organisations supplying Domiciliary Care, Care Homes and Supported Living Providers a one-off payment which is representative of an additional 10% of their current contract value for 12 weeks as at 31/3/2020. We have decided to provide this funding as a one-off payment as we know that providers are currently incurring significant additional costs in relation to the purchasing of PPE, agency staff, funding for staff who are unable to work and other financial challenges and this will immediately support their cash flow.

In addition, to assist local suppliers and companies during COVID-19, the Council is committed to pay invoices within 5 working days of the invoice date or sooner rather than on the usual 30-day terms. This commenced from 1 April 2020.

We will review the funding that we gave to providers to support them with the significant costs they have been incurring as a result of COVID-19. As we move forward for all provider partners as well as for the Care Homes.

3. Question from Councillor Roger Evans

I note the recent press release sent out by the cabinet member concerning schools and the money provided by government to help them recover extra costs due to coronavirus (COVID-19)

Areas are identified in the appropriate government paper that is referred to in this press release. The paper is entitled

Coronavirus (COVID-19): financial support for schools.

It details examples of what they (Government) consider can be covered by this fund. These include the increased premises related costs; support for free school meals for eligible children who are not attending school and additional cleaning.

If schools face other, extraordinary costs to deliver appropriate support to their pupils through the period referred to elsewhere in the document they should contact the DfE.

Have Shropshire Council sought any extra help for Local Authority Schools that have and are incurring costs other than those listed above.

Response:

Government guidance on School funding: exceptional costs associated with coronavirus (COVID-19) for the period March to July 2020 was published on 7 April 2020.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-schools/school-funding-exceptional-costs-associated-with-coronavirus-covid-19-for-the-period-march-to-july-2020>

It referenced that in June “...we will publish further guidance for schools on the process for informing us of any additional costs relating to coronavirus (COVID-19)”. It is hoped that this guidance will take account of the actual experience of schools during the first phase of lockdown, in which the loss of ‘private income’ has been an issue for a number of schools and is not covered by the guidance published on 7 April. Shropshire Council officers have repeatedly brought this to the attention of Department for Education officials and would hope to see this covered in the revised guidance.

The guidance may also look towards other cost pressures schools will be facing as they begin planning for a phased return of some year groups after the summer half-term, for example, the purchasing of PPE for use in schools.

Council officers have regular meetings with the DfE and continue to put pressure on them regarding the loss of private income and additional costs schools are incurring as a result of COVID-19. They continue to support our maintained schools, in particular those with budget pressures, including how they are able to use reserves or other resources at their disposal. Where there are exceptions to this, we will look at individual cases, in order to present and take up individual cases to the DfE.

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