

Cabinet

Minutes of meeting held remotely on 3 June 2020 at 2.00 pm

Present:

Councillor David Tutt (Chair)

Councillors Stephen Holt (Deputy-Chair), Margaret Bannister, Jonathan Dow, Alan Shuttleworth, Colin Swansborough and Rebecca Whippy

Officers in attendance:

Robert Cottrill (Chief Executive), Homira Javadi (Chief Finance Officer), Ian Fitzpatrick (Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning), Catherine Knight (Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services), Tim Whelan (Director of Service Delivery), Peter Finnis (Assistant Director for Corporate Governance), Jo Harper (Head of Business Planning and Performance) and Simon Russell (Committee and Civic Services Manager)

Also in attendance:

Councillor Robert Smart (Shadow Cabinet Member)

67 Minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2020 were submitted and approved and the Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

68 Apologies for absence

None were reported.

69 Declaration of members' interests

Councillor Shuttleworth declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 7 (Council's response to Covid-19) as Chair of the Langney Community Library Trustees, who had received funds from the Small Business Grant Fund for retail, leisure and hospitality as part of the government response to Covid-19. He remained present and took part in discussions during this item.

70 Council's response to Covid-19

The Cabinet considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning, updating them on the establishment and operation of a Community Hub and other changes in business operation to respond to community needs as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Cabinet paid tribute to council staff, councillors, the business and voluntary sector and wider community for their response to the pandemic.

An array of council schemes had been rapidly implemented with positive impact for residents and businesses, such as setting up a community hub to distribute thousands of food parcels to vulnerable people, the Business Grants Portal going live and undertaking daily welfare calls to tenants in sheltered accommodation and calls to all tenants over the age of 69.

The Director of Service Delivery updated the Cabinet, confirming that at present, 1,444 businesses had taken advantage of the small businesses grant scheme, equating to over £18 million. In addition to this, £25 million of business rate relief had been delivered to businesses since March.

Further details of the response, including support for council staff and redeployment during the pandemic were contained in the report.

Thanks were conveyed to the District Councils' Network and Local Government Association for their continued representation to central government on behalf of local authorities across the United Kingdom.

Councillor Shuttleworth declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item. He remained present and took part in discussions during this item.

Resolved (Non-key decision):

To note the report

Reason for decision:

The Community Hub has been an important part of the council's response to the Covid 19 pandemic locally and the report updated the Cabinet on progress, performance and next steps in this work. The report also provides a summary of the impact of the pandemic across the council's business, focusing on the support provided to staff and on those areas most affected by current circumstances.

71 Initial financial assessment of Covid-19

The Cabinet considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer, updating them on the initial financial impact of Covid-19 and associated budgetary implications.

Visiting member, Councillor Smart, addressed the Cabinet on this item.

The Chief Finance Officer presented the report and made reference to the Council's latest submission to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), appended to the report.

The budget for 2020/21 was approved by Full Council in February 2020. The budget took into consideration that the Council no longer received any Revenue Support Grant and had to meet the cost of its services through locally generated income.

In addressing the economic slowdown last year due to factors such as the uncertainty over Brexit and increased demand for key services such as homelessness and housing need, the Council came up with further efficiencies, savings and income targets that formed part of the agreed budget for 2020/21. Although the targets set were challenging and robust, several reviews and risk assessments were carried out to ensure the budget set was fully tested and sustainable.

During the initial phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council implemented a wide range of initiatives in order to support the most vulnerable in the Borough, working in partnership with the voluntary sector. Emergency response funding from central government to date had totalled £1.09 million.

The Council's increased spending in response to the crisis and projected loss of income due to the pandemic had significantly impacted on the savings targets set in February. It was estimated that additional costs, including delayed savings programmes, arising from Covid-19 could be as high as £300,000 per week, should the lockdown continue and result in a long term economic downturn. It was stated that this was an approximate impact and worst case scenario.

The Chief Finance Officer re-assured the Cabinet that in terms of cash flow, the Council was currently in a robust and sustainable position. Subject to revised government measures being put in place, the council should avoid the need to borrow to support cashflow until the end of August at the earliest.

The Council would continue to internally review and closely monitor the financial position and look at ways to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 and engage with the MHCLG in partnership.

Resolved (Non-key decision):

(1) To note the initial financial impact of Covid-19 and associated vulnerability of the authority's budget.

(2) To note the assumptions being made about the ongoing financial impact of Covid-19.

(3) To authorise the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of Council, Cabinet member for Finance and the Chief Finance Officer, to make use of monies held in the Council's Reserves as he believes most appropriate in order to continue essential service delivery and/or to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 emergency on residents and/or service users.

Reason for decisions:

The Council's response to Covid-19 has been and continues to be fast paced. Budgetary assumptions are liable to change and are only given as an indication. This report provides a position statement at this time to keep Cabinet informed.

The meeting ended at 3.06 pm

Councillor David Tutt (Chair)