

CABINET

Meeting held on Tuesday, 1st December, 2020 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor Jason Zadrozny in the Chair;

Councillors Kier Barsby, Samantha Deakin,
Tom Hollis, Rachel Madden, David Martin,
Matthew Relf, Helen-Ann Smith,
Daniel Williamson and John Wilmott.

Officers Present: Craig Bonar, Lynn Cain, Carol Cooper-Smith,
Ruth Dennis, Katherine Green,
Theresa Hodgkinson, Peter Hudson, Mike Joy,
Paul Parkinson and Shane Wright.

In Attendance: Councillors Jim Blagden, Christian Chapman,
Dale Grounds and David Hennigan.

CA.40 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

CA.41 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 13 October 2020 be received and approved as a correct record.

CA.42 Announcement from the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council took the opportunity to update Cabinet in relation to the latest Government guidelines regarding the Tiered system following the end of the second national lockdown.

The latest figures showed that the cases of positive Covid infections within the Ashfield area were decreasing and currently stood at 197 per 100,000 as opposed to 252 per 100,000 as of the previous week.

However, the Ashfield District was still the second highest in Nottinghamshire and everyone needed to remain vigilant and continue to follow the safety and distancing guidelines as prescribed.

It had been disappointing news that Ashfield would be remaining in Tier 3 and this was extremely worrying for the District's hospitality sector and their longer term aims to remain viable and trading.

A Government vote was due today in respect of the new strengthened Tiered guidelines and at no point had local Council leaders been offered the opportunity to influence any discussions or decision making regarding these designations. Unfortunately, it had also been disappointing to see that the local MP was continuing to put misleading information out to local residents via his social media platforms.

No details had yet been received in relation to mass testing in Nottinghamshire and notwithstanding the fact that 10,000 lateral flow testing kits had been received by the County Council, no further information had yet been circulated as to the next steps to be taken.

To conclude Cabinet were reminded that the Council continued to provide a full range of services including waste collections and the Bag It Scheme.

Having listened to Government officials, it seemed very unlikely that Nottinghamshire would realistically move down from Tier 3 on the review date of 16 December but everyone still remained hopeful for some positive news.

A thank you was also extended to the Council's new Covid Information Team who had already made a very positive impact within the town centres and had been warmly welcomed by local businesses in the area.

(Prior to consideration of the next item and in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4 (Order of Business), the Chairman advised that he would be moving the agenda order and considering agenda item 5 (Scrutiny Review: Community Protection Service) as the next item of business. Cabinet Members concurred with this course of action.)

CA.43 Scrutiny Review: Community Protection Service

The Scrutiny Panel A Chairman, Councillor Christian Chapman, presented the report which contained the final recommendations from the review of the Council's Community Protection Service undertaken from January to November 2020.

Throughout the review, Members had worked closely with the Director of Place and Communities, as well as officers from the Community Safety team including CPO's who attended several meetings of the Panel. Speaking to the CPO's had enabled Members to gain an improved understanding of the challenges they face in their day-to-day work and the wider demands placed upon the Community Protection Service.

As the review progressed, Members were made aware of an ongoing restructure within Community Safety, and were informed that discussions held, as part of the review, would be used as part of the restructure process. The restructure of the service included the recruitment of two new Team Leader positions ensuring increased flexibility and improved strategic management, some of the key concerns that had been raised initially by the Panel.

RESOLVED that

- a) Cabinet concurs with Scrutiny Panel A and notes the importance of and endorses the ongoing restructure and recruitment exercise within Community Safety thus ensuring the Community Protection Service is fully resourced;
- b) full consideration be given to the equipment needs of Community Protection Officers to ensure that the on-street presence and back office support maximises efficiency in both reporting and monitoring casework;
- c) the Community Protection Service to focus on four core priorities of:
 - Providing a visible presence
 - Dealing with anti-social behaviour issues
 - Working collaboratively with key partners
 - Ensuring public safety in Ashfield

whilst maintaining a flexible approach to holistic issues;

- d) as part of a wider engagement initiative, a managed consultation exercise is undertaken to understand public perception of the Community Protection Service also allowing the Council an opportunity to raise awareness of the Community Protection Service and its priorities;
- e) delegated power be granted to the Director of Place and Communities, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, to ensure all options are explored regarding the use of powers accredited to Community Protection Officers;
- f) the Community Protection Service continues to expand on partnership working with the Police and other key partners, including training opportunities and intelligence sharing, to ensure a more integrated approach to community safety in the District;
- g) following the review and restructure of Community Safety, the Community Protection Service topic be referred back to Scrutiny as appropriate in 2021.

Reason:

The Council's Community Protection Service was added to the Scrutiny Workplan 2019/20 in July 2019 and subsequently added to the Scrutiny Workplan 2020/21 by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2020.

CA.44 COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel - Verbal Update

The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Panel gave an update to Cabinet regarding the work undertaken at the latest meeting of the Panel.

COVID-19 Response and Recovery Panel Meeting – 5 November 2020

The fourth meeting of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel was held on the 5 November 2020 and focussed on business recovery in

Ashfield. Both the Chairman and Vice Chairman had been busy contacting and supporting businesses across Ashfield and to date, there had been 926 business grant funding applications received with 522 businesses having been successfully awarded around £1.92 million. Thanks were extended to the Council's Finance, Revenues and Communications Teams for their continued commitment towards facilitating the programme in a swift and timely manner.

Ideas/Suggestions from the 5 November 2020 Panel Meeting

The Vice Chairman informed Cabinet of the ideas and suggestions that had arisen as a result of the Panel's discussion and advised Members that item 3 had been amended slightly to include recognition for the Discover Ashfield Board and the Town Centre Trader Groups already established within the District:

1. concerns for the ongoing viability and survival of sole traders and small businesses should lockdowns continue;
2. to avoid undue worry and to allow local businesses to react proactively to the current climate, a request for additional communication regarding the latest Government guidelines to be sent out to business communities in a swift and timely manner;
3. to make all businesses aware of existing local business forums like Discover Ashfield Board and our Town Centre Trader Groups and encourage their participation and if needed, to establish new forums where existing provisions are not suitable;
4. to continue work around the establishment of a shop recognition scheme for businesses that have provided exemplary Covid-secure environments for customers;
5. options for how the Council and local businesses can continue to support local foodbanks and health and wellbeing organisations during the pandemic;
6. appreciation to Cabinet for the imminent provision of hand sanitiser stations at car parking ticket machine location;
7. concerns around the extensive, ongoing, cost of providing PPE to protect employees and a hope to see a tax relief or reimbursement scheme from Government in the near future.

Work was also ongoing by the Economic Regeneration Unit to formulate some appropriate case studies, to reflect the experiences shared by the business owners in attendance at the meeting and to be showcased via the Council's media platforms as appropriate.

Due to the lack of clear and concise information from Government in relation to the latest lockdown guidelines, the Chairman advised that both himself and the Vice Chairman had trawled the internet for the most up to date information and had shared it with Members accordingly. The Communications team had also been busy with developing and circulating informative 'Questions & Answers' for Members.

In relation to Ashfield's local businesses, the Council remained concerned as to how some of the smaller concerns would continue to trade in the longer term and felt compelled to tell and share their stories. This week would see the 'Small Business Saturday' event and free parking was being offered at weekends during December to encourage customers to shop local in Ashfield's town centres following the latest lockdown.

The Town Centres Manager and Covid Information officers were also continuing to work extremely hard to offer support and guidance to local businesses in a variety of ways including the distribution of leaflets containing the latest Government information.

To conclude, the ongoing issues of the large costs being incurred by businesses providing PPE equipment for its employees was considered and it had been hoped that the Government might continue to offer its relief scheme to ease the financial burden being placed on businesses. It was therefore extremely disappointing to learn that the Government has recently scrapped the temporary 0% VAT waiver on PPE equipment, returning to the 20% VAT tax from November.

RESOLVED that

- a) the update from the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Panel, as presented, be received and noted;
- b) Cabinet acknowledges and supports the ideas and suggestions arising from the Panel discussions at its 5 November 2020 meeting:
 1. concerns for the ongoing viability and survival of sole traders and small businesses should lockdowns continue.
 2. to avoid undue worry and to allow local businesses to react proactively to the current climate, a request for additional communication regarding the latest Government guidelines to be sent out to business communities in a swift and timely manner;
 3. to make all businesses aware of existing local business forums like Discover Ashfield Board and our Town Centre Trader Groups and encourage their participation and if needed, to establish new forums where existing provisions are not suitable;
 4. to continue work around the establishment of a shop recognition scheme for businesses that have provided exemplary Covid-secure environments for customers;
 5. options for how the Council and local businesses can continue to support local foodbanks and health and wellbeing organisations during the pandemic;
 6. appreciation to Cabinet for the imminent provision of hand sanitiser stations at car parking ticket machine location;

7. concerns around the extensive, ongoing, cost of providing PPE to protect employees and a hope to see a tax relief or reimbursement scheme from Government in the near future.

CA.45 The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

Cabinet was requested to acknowledge the requirements within the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Code and approve the introduction of a Housing Complaints Policy as presented.

Members considered the alternative option of declining to comply with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and not produce a Housing Complaints Policy but this was not recommended.

RESOLVED that

- a) the requirements within the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Code, be duly acknowledged;
- b) the introduction of a Housing Complaints Policy, as presented, be approved;
- c) the self-assessment to be published on the Council's website by 31 December 2020, be authorised.

Reasons:

1. Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code forms part of the statutory membership obligations set out in the Housing Ombudsman Scheme. Landlords must comply with the requirements of the Code or offer an explanation to the Ombudsman as to why they do not.
2. A self-assessment has been undertaken against the Complaint Handling Code which the Housing Ombudsman published in July 2020. Currently the Council is not meeting all of the requirements of the Code; therefore the new policy and a number of actions are required to be implemented in readiness for the requirement to publish the self-assessment by the 31st December 2020.

CA.46 2020/21 Forecast Outturn Position for General Fund, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Capital Programme as at September 2020

Cabinet Members were asked to consider the summary of the Council's forecast financial outturn position to 31 March 2021 compared to the latest approved budgets for the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the Capital Programme.

Members considered the alternative options of declining to approve the budget adjustments and not recommending to Council the proposed addition to the Capital Programme as set out in the report.

RESOLVED that

- a) the current forecast outturn for the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Capital Programme 2020/21 as presented, be received and noted;
- b) the budget adjustments outlined in section 3.1 and Table 3 of the report, be approved;
- c) Council be recommended to approve the proposed addition to the Capital Programme as set out in Section 6.3 of the report.

Reason:

In accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations to report to those charged with Governance, the financial position.

CA.47 Green Spaces Capital Investment Programme

Cabinet was requested to consider the proposed site-specific green space improvement projects for the funding approved at Council on 22 October 2020 and to note progress on the Green Space Improvement Programme.

As part of the debate, Councillor Dale Grounds addressed the Cabinet in relation to the new Play Park Accessibility Review, to be undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and to speak about inclusivity for children with special needs accessing the Council's parks and open spaces.

Members considered the alternative option of declining to agree the proposed allocation of improvements but this was not recommended. Each of the improvements had been identified in consultation with the Leader and Ward Members and a number of sites required intervention this financial year to ensure that the quality of the District's green space provision remained high.

RESOLVED that

- a) the proposed site-specific green space improvement projects, as outlined in the report, be approved;
- b) progress on the Green Space Improvement Programme, as presented, be received and noted.

Reasons:

1. The improvements have been identified following a review of the play area annual inspection reports and site walkovers with the Leader and Ward Members.
2. The sites are all neighbourhood sites which have not received investment for several years and require improvement. Improvements will include additional pieces of play equipment, bins and signage, footpath works and tree planting.
3. The sites are a valuable community resource, particularly during the pandemic when people have been making greater use of their local green spaces. These improvements will provide significant investment into green

spaces this financial year, complementing the existing commitment of over £1.5m spend by the end of March 2021.

CA.48 Business Support and Towns Funding Update

Members were asked to note the updates regarding support to businesses during the pandemic, progress on the Towns Fund Accelerated Projects and agreeing the principle of utilising Compulsory Purchase Powers where required for projects being developed through the Towns Fund or other funding sources.

Members considered the alternative option of declining to agree to the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders but this was not recommended as it would reduce the Council's options and weaken its negotiating position.

RESOLVED that

- a) the updates regarding support to businesses during the pandemic and progress on the Towns Fund Accelerated Projects, as presented, be received and noted;
- b) the principle of utilising Compulsory Purchase Powers if required for projects being developed through the Towns Fund or other funding sources, be agreed.

Reasons:

1. To ensure that Cabinet is updated on the measures being taken to support businesses through the pandemic and progress on the Towns Fund Accelerated projects.
2. To ensure that the Council is able to utilise all available powers to ensure that projects can be taken forward and to support discussion and negotiations with landowners and developers, as well as strengthening funding bids.

The meeting closed at 11.46 am

Chairman.