

ENTERPRISE AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 9th July, 2020

Present:-

Councillor Brittain (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

Councillors Coy
Hollingworth
T Gilby

Councillors

Snowdon
Catt

Liz Cook Housing

Neil Johnson
Christine Durrant

Economic Development
Executive Director

40 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' AND OFFICERS' INTERESTS RELATING TO ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

No declarations of interest were received.

41 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Kate Caulfield and Ade McCormick.

42 MINUTES

The minutes were accepted as a true record.

43 CABINET MEMBERS FOR HOUSING, ECONOMIC GROWTH AND TOWN CENTRES & VISITOR ECONOMY - COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND RECOVERY

The Executive Director presented an update to the committee of the significant impact of COVID-19 across the Borough and the Council's long-term plans. It was acknowledged that there had been a higher level of resilience in Chesterfield due to the public sector nature of its workforce but that the rates of unemployment would increase and the self-employed were particularly vulnerable.

The Council had responded promptly to the requests for Business Rate Relief and that had brought £18 million back into the economy. Grants

had also been awarded to businesses and the business rates team and the finances teams had worked very hard in this area. As a commercial landlord with 400 tenants, the council had offered payment holidays or deferment as assistance.

The markets had re-opened following a huge amount of work including with other agencies, which was really important, and the feedback had been positive. A grant of £92,000 had been received to help re-open the high street and this had helped to fund communications and also the temporary public realm adaptations.

There had been a rise in active travel, with 95% of bus routes open but only 30% in use and this was seen as a positive move, with the hope that this change might be retained.

All major developments had continued with the view that this could instil confidence in other developers to move forward with their projects.

The current priorities were to offer advice to start ups and raise the profile of the Borough to attract businesses and secure investment.

The Assistant Director for Economic Development informed the committee that approximately 50% of town centre businesses were open and as the number increased it was important to maintain social distancing. An overview of current developments in the borough was presented as follows;

- At Peak Resort, David Lloyd had started work on site and a planning application had been received for a health and wellbeing campus situated there
- The Enterprise Centre at the Northern Gateway was pushing ahead, and it was hoped that the public realm work on Elder Way and Packers Row would start at the end of August
- HS2 was maintaining progress, with a potential for 10,000 new jobs
- The Staveley Town Deal was worth £20 million and sited as a fantastic opportunity to improve wellbeing in that area

It was acknowledged that the visitor economy had been massively impacted by COVID-19 and that the Economic Development team were identifying measures to help support recovery.

The Assistant Director for Economic Development responded to a question regarding the vacant units below the Premier Inn, explaining that

there were currently two interested parties. The units were still being marketed and it was hoped that once those two units were occupied this would encourage others.

Discussion took place around levels of unemployment and the difficulties in forecasting how this would impact Chesterfield and its supply chain. The committee was assured that grant monies secured from D2N2 were contracted and therefore were guaranteed.

The Executive Director presented an overview of the Housing Service to the committee and started by highlighting the commitment of all staff right from the beginning. It was noted that even if staff couldn't do their normal job they did not hesitate to help in other roles and redeployment was seen across the Housing Service.

Careline staff made friendly calls to make sure residents were ok. The partnership working around rough sleeping had been essential and the Assistant Director for Housing and her team led on the 'Keeping everyone in' strategy county wide. The ban on evictions was being lifted 23rd August and planning work was underway to deal with any potential back log. Throughout the lockdown period there were a reduced number of calls to the homelessness team but those had now resumed.

All but emergency moves had been suspended and the allocations team were working through the backlog. A recovery plan was in place. The tenancy management and sustainment teams were focussed on supporting vulnerable tenants.

The Commercial services team responded quickly to the lockdown by producing risk assessments that allowed them to continue with emergency repairs and planned essential maintenance. It was acknowledged that the Commercial Services Team and Housing Team had worked together excellently throughout.

Members noted their appreciation to the staff and the importance of keeping services open, particularly careline. The restarting of allocations was seen as a positive move. A question was asked regarding how successful the offer of alternative accommodation had been in terms of homelessness. The Assistant Director of Housing confirmed that the procurement of a nearby hotel had been very successful as it presented an opportunity for staff to engage with the residents daily and form relationships whilst also involving other agencies.

A member asked about the redeployment and furloughing of staff. The Executive Director explained that a review was conducted at the start of lockdown by HR to identify areas that might need additional resources. Staff were asked to volunteer for redeployment and therefore some staff were moved and some retrained. There were still some staff on furlough at the time of the meeting.

Clarification was given regarding the availability of materials. No significant problems were encountered at the start of lockdown when carrying out emergency repairs, but plaster became scarce. It was made very clear to staff that if they did not have adequate PPE then they should not undertake relevant tasks. On this basis, the only service affected was Careline where there was a brief pause in service.

It was reported that corporate support had been provided by Commercial Services including sourcing and installing screens and increased cleaning services. Refuse collection continued throughout. The Parks and Open Spaces teams had worked hard to keep the parks open and consulted with the various tennis clubs, bowls clubs, angling societies etc.

Leisure centres were planning to re-open 25th July. Members would be required to book in advance before attending the facilities and activities would have a phased return for example starting with lane swimming and the gym before lessons and classes could start. Careful consideration had been given to staff and user safety in terms of reduced capacities, enhanced supervision and increased cleaning regimes.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing advised that a video would be made available the following week on both leisure centres. The staff had been well briefed and were looking forward to welcoming back the users.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted.
2. That a further update on the impact of COVID 19 on homelessness be considered by the committee at a future date.
3. That it be noted that wherever possible, reports to the Enterprise and Wellbeing Committee be prepared and submitted with the agenda.

44 FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan for the four month period 1 July, 2020 to 31 October, 2020 was presented for information.

RESOLVED –

That the Forward Plan be noted.

45 SCRUTINY MONITORING

The Committee considered the Scrutiny recommendations monitoring schedule.

RESOLVED -

That the Scrutiny monitoring schedule be noted.

46 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME ARRANGEMENTS FOR 2020/21

The Committee noted that the meeting of the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum on 25 June, 2020 had confirmed an interim work programme, including the following items for the next scheduled meeting of the Enterprise and Wellbeing Committee on 1 October, 2020:

- Parks and Open Spaces Strategy
- Five Year Housing Supply
- Progress Report on the Skills Action Plan

It was noted that further work was scheduled to finalise the scrutiny work programme for the whole of 2020/21, prior to submission to the scrutiny committees in September and October, 2020.

RESOLVED -

1) That the items from the interim work programme for the Committee's next scheduled meeting on 1 October, 2020 be approved.