

BOROUGH OF REIGATE AND BANSTEAD

RECOVERY SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Recovery Scrutiny Panel held Remote - Virtual Meeting on 14 January 2021 at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillors N. D. Harrison, R. Michalowski, S. Parnall, J. E. Philpott, T. Schofield (Deputy Leader), S. Sinden and S. T. Walsh

13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor K. Foreman.

14. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the last meeting were approved.

15. PROGRESS UPDATE SINCE LAST MEETING - PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION (SLIDE PACK)

Panel Members received a presentation on the COVID-19 Recovery work and progress to date. Councillor T. Schofield, Executive Member for Finance, highlighted different areas which included the recovery workstreams and timescales as well as a review of second lockdown recovery activity and summary of the Council's third lockdown response.

Members said they needed to reflect what the Council was going to have to do now we were back in lockdown and which plans might need to be revisited. It was noted that there had been a good learning process as part of the recovery programme and the latest lockdown was being handled well.

- **Welfare calls** – some staff had been redeployed to make telephone calls to the most vulnerable but most of the activity was now business as usual and part of the 'new normal' way of working.
- **New Ways of Working Group** – it was noted that recovery implied the Council would get back to where it was in early 2020 but this was unlikely to be the case as hybrid working would be a normal way of working going forwards after the COVID-19 response finished. It was agreed that holding remote meetings was an efficient and economical way of working. It was agreed that the Council will probably always continue with a mixture of physical and remote meetings. The New Ways of Working group (which covers this) was due to be refocused as a strategic change/transformation programme. All of this did not have an impact on the Council's Emergency Planning structures and responsibilities.
- **Covid marshals** – Members asked about volunteers and the use of Covid marshals. It was confirmed that two Covid marshals had been recruited by the Council and were working closely with other Council officers and the police during the latest lockdown.

- **Greenspaces** – the police were working to identify drivers from as far away as Brighton and Croydon who had come to the Borough for walks. Priory Park, Reigate Hill and Earlswood Common had been particularly busy with people using the cafes in large numbers. Greenspaces were going to take action and the cafes would be asked to make sure that their social media asked their visitors to come from local areas only. Members reported that Memorial Park in Redhill had not been as busy.
- **Social distancing** – Members noted that when people had received their vaccinations they may be less careful about social distancing. All would receive a pamphlet when they were vaccinated, and it was hoped that older groups would continue to be cautious. Supermarkets were getting tougher with shoppers, asking shoppers to wear masks.
- **Grants to local businesses** – it was noted that the Council was currently managing the distribution of about seven different grants from Government. The Executive Member for Finance was getting regular reports on how many businesses had applied for grants and the Executive Member for Economic Prosperity was reaching out to other businesses if they had not applied for grants. Businesses needed to keep applying for grants to cover overheads for the months ahead. It was complex to administer, and the Finance team had set up separate accounting systems to be fully transparent. Other businesses had engaged with the Council to apply for other grants that the Council had historically awarded. Panel Members had been sent a financial summary that would be going to Executive at the end of January that set out forecast losses as well as additional costs and expenditure due to the pandemic. Councillor T. Schofield said he would come back to Members about the amount of grants flowing out to businesses.
- **Leader's briefings** – Members appreciated the fortnightly briefings on the COVID-19 response for Members. This would be the mechanism going forwards for updating Members.
- **Services during the third lockdown** – Members asked about the impact of the third lockdown on planning and services. It was confirmed that no services to residents had been suspended (except for those unable to open due to Government restrictions – such as the Harlequin) and protocols and processes were in place if more staff had to self-isolate, for example, bringing in agency workers to support refuse collectors. Third parties such as voluntary organisations and churches were linking in with each other and locality meetings were ongoing and productive, aiding effective collaboration. The recovery plan was felt to be robust enough to manage foreseeable scenarios now.
- **Communications with residents** – Members asked about communications to residents on COVID-19 matters. They asked how many residents were signed up to receive emails from the Council. Officers would find out and send this information to Members after the meeting. An example was given about rumours to do with the poor postal service in Tadworth. Residents had been told wrongly through some Members' well-meaning social media or through online neighbourhood forums or Facebook groups to go direct to a website if they had not received letters in the post. Members said good quality regular communications between the Council as a trusted source and residents was vital. Members also questioned why the emailed Leader's briefing newsletter to Members and MPs was marked confidential and could not be distributed as it contained useful information which was in the public domain. Members asked if the Borough Council's messages could be

disseminated more widely through online neighbourhood forums. It was noted that RBBC was not responsible for some services which were provided by Surrey County Council or the NHS. Members suggested having an automated telephone message on the Council's phone lines for residents who do not have an internet connection.

16. NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Panel Members were given an overview of the next steps in the recovery work and proposed recommendations from the Panel to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The two proposed recommendations were to:

- i. Note progress of the Recovery workstreams and proposals for future recovery and transformation activity, and give the Panel's observations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- ii. Agree that future oversight on this activity takes place via the usual mechanisms and recommend to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the Panel be wound up.

Officers confirmed that the New Ways of Working programme would report into the Organisation Board and be reported to Members through programme dashboards in the normal way as business as usual.

The Panel agreed the two recommendations above with the proviso that there would be regular updates to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. They also set out a third recommendation that the Committee:

- iii. Considers the Recovery Scrutiny Panel recommendation that:
 - (a) Assurance is sought that work will continue to ensure that the Council's communications strategy to residents is effective, especially in relation to COVID-19 messaging; and
 - (b) Recognising that new ways of working established during the pandemic will become business as usual, the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Policy & Resources is requested to review relevant ICT arrangements and provide an update to the Committee in due course.

17. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no items of any other business.

The Meeting closed at 7.34 pm