

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

CO-ORDINATING O&S COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING

0900 hours on Friday 29th May 2020, On-line meeting

Action Notes

Present:

Councillor Carl Rice (Chair)

Councillors: Deidre Alden, Albert Bore, Debbie Clancy, Liz Clements, Roger Harmer, Ewan Mackey, Rob Pocock, Lou Robson and Kath Scott.

Also Present:

Cllr Ward, Leader

Graeme Betts, former Gold Commander and Acting Chief Executive

Rebecca Hellard, Interim Chief Finance Officer

Catherine Parkinson, Interim City Solicitor and Interim Monitoring Officer

Michael Enderby, Head of Resilience and Operations

Emma Williamson, Head of Scrutiny Services

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chair advised that this meeting would be webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet site (www.civico.net/birmingham) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there were confidential or exempt items.

2. APOLOGIES

Cllr Holbrook

3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None.

4. ACTION NOTES

(See documents No 1).

RESOLVED:

The action notes from the meeting held on 6th March 2020 were agreed.

5. COVID 19 UPDATE

(See document No 2).

Cllr Ian Ward introduced the report, noting the extraordinary situation that the Council has been confronted with. He said that the staff, management and members have done outstanding work and all members added their thanks. The Council has written to the Government asking that a business survival fund is started but a response has not yet been received.

In response to questions the following points were made:

- In relation to Business Rates Grants, the Leader noted that there was information on the website and guidance has now been issued. Applications will be invited from Monday.
- There was concern about the lack of transparency in decision-making during the emergency. Members emphasised that they were not questioning officer decision making in that time but felt that publication could have happened sooner. And it was also noted that scrutiny had had no role in the decision-making and there should be more involvement as future decisions are being taken.
- The former Gold Commander assured members that Directors were asked to involve Cabinet Members in decision making and set out the circumstances and reasons for the approach to decision-making, noting the volume and speed required for such decisions and the unprecedented nature of the emergency. All decisions are being collated for publication no later than the end of June.
- The Leader reminded members of the speed of response required and the need to redeploy staff, and publishing decisions had to come second to that. The Leader also noted that around 10% of council staff have been self-isolating. The Leader and Gold Commander have had daily meetings, and he paid tribute to Graeme Betts who stepped into the role of Acting Chief Executive and Gold Commander and has done an exceptional job. Cabinet meets informally twice a week and discussed matters collectively and happy to account to scrutiny for those decisions. One example is the advice on the gradual re-opening of schools.
- On further questioning on social care easements, members noted that they had found out through the media. The Interim City Solicitor undertook to liaise with officers to look at releasing the report. The Chair of Health Social Care O&S Committee made reference to a letter he and committee members had sent to the Chief Executive saying that members believed they should have been notified of the decision and that the length of time to publish the decision was not reasonable. There also needs to be a clear statement of scrutiny's role in an emergency.
- The chair said that a piece of work to do after the crisis is over is to review the council's response to learn any lessons.
- Graeme Betts noted that the activation of the emergency plan has been for an extended period and the level of risk was way beyond what we had encountered and "life and limb" decisions were being taken.

- Planning for a future increase in Covid-19 cases should be shared, including how members can advise their constituents.
- The Leader advised that the recovery was not about “going back to normal” in all aspects – there have been gains in air quality and need to work to a fairer city, as some have been more affected than others AS government amends the guidance and lifts the lockdown, there need to be plans about how people can move about the city safely.
- The Chair asked about public briefings, as the government currently do these daily. Where local information is required – as it may be in the future- how will this be communicated effectively? The Leader answered that he will be discussing this on Monday, to ensure a close eye is kept on further outbreaks and communicating key information effectively. The Chair asked that views of members and the wider community were taken into account.
- With regards to sustainable transport, the council needs to look at how we ensure behaviour change to more sustainable modes. The Leader thanked public transport providers for providing free travel for NHS staff.
- Thanks were also given to IT officers for their work in getting all staff and members up and running with remote working.
- It was noted that local government and organisations can often respond more quickly, which also underlines the need to develop further the local structures within the city. The Leader noted that decisions had been devolved where possible – for example in relation to the gradual re-opening of schools.
- Moves to a carbon neutral city were also discussed, and the importance of using the recovery to strengthen this. The Leader has asked for a paper on options for meeting the 2030 zero carbon target without further impoverishing communities. The Leader agreed that we want to see a cleaner, greener and fairer Birmingham.
- Other issues raised were concerns about people switching to cars when we want to encourage sustainable transport, but also the need to protect people and enforce social distancing, so as not to discourage people from coming into the city centre.
- There was a request to re-consider the number of people who can attend a funeral. The Leader said that, with changing guidance from government, policies are being reviewed.
- Scrutiny also needs to ensure it keeps an appropriate eye on “business as usual” work, e.g. Planning, and other major decisions that are being taken or planned e.g. on waste disposal.
- In response to questions about adult social care, Graeme Betts emphasised that the directorate does engage with the independent care sector; and Cllr Hamilton will look at membership of the Health and Wellbeing Board. Inequalities in health is something we should be putting more emphasis on and will do so as we come out of this crisis.
- The NEC have put forward a proposal to be a test bed for the re-opening of the leisure sector and plans for that are underway.

The Chair thanked the Leader for all his endeavours during this difficult time,

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is on the 3 July 2020.

Proposed items for the next meeting were the Performance Monitoring report.

In response to a question about meetings in the Council House, the Chair said that it was important to remain in step with arrangements for other committee meetings as well as the easing of the lockdown.

9. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL-IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS RECEIVED (IF ANY)

None.

10. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

11. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

RESOLVED:

In an urgent situation between meetings, the Chairman jointly with the relevant Chief Officer has authority to act on behalf of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 1045 hours.