

Runnymede Borough CouncilOVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE14 July 2020 at 6.00.p.m.via MS Teams

Members of the Committee present: Councillors J Furey (Chairman), T Gracey (Vice-Chairman), J Broadhead, S Dennett, R Edis, E Gill, L Gillham and S Mackay.

Members of the Committee absent: Councillor M Brierley.

Councillors T Burton, M Cressey, D Clarke, N King, J Olorenshaw, N Prescott and P Sohi also attended.

Mr Spencer Doran, a member of the public, also attended.

82 NOTIFICATION OF CHANGE TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Group mentioned below had notified the Chief Executive of their wish that the change listed below be made to the membership of the Committee. The change was for a fixed period ending on the day after the meeting and thereafter the Councillor removed would be reappointed.

Group	Remove from Membership	Appoint Instead
Runnymede Independent Residents'	Councillor A Alderson	Councillor E Gill

The Chief Executive had given effect to this request in accordance with Section 16(2) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

83 CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE REVIEW

The Committee considered those matters in its terms of reference for the review of the response to the coronavirus pandemic that it agreed should be considered at its second meeting. This would provide it with information so that it could decide whether any of the recommendations in the draft Coronavirus Response Debrief Report which it had noted at its meeting on 2 July 2020 should be amended or whether any additional recommendations should be made in the Report.

The Committee considered the speed at which the welfare cell was set up and the operational links of the cell with calls to vulnerable people and the shielded list (proactive support) as well as Customer Services (reactive request support). The Committee also considered the range of matters dealt with and how the support requests were managed. In order to assist the Committee with its review of these various matters it received verbal contributions from three officer Runnymede Borough Council (RBC) witnesses, Peter Burke (Environmental Services), Linda Norman (Customer Services) and Darren Williams (Community Services).

Following the announcement on 23 March by the Prime Minister of a series of measures to restrict the spread of the coronavirus which were described as "lockdown", Peter Burke and Darren Williams had met on the 24 March to discuss what would be needed for a welfare cell. By 25 March the basis of a welfare cell had been established. The Council's IT section provided the equipment. Proactive calls started on 25 March. By 26 March the

welfare system went live 7 days a week with a proactive call list established. Customer Services managed reactive requests and the welfare cell was established for escalations or referrals.

Proactive calls were made to those people who were shielded and those people who were vulnerable. The welfare cell consisted predominantly of Council staff in the Environmental Services and Customer Services sections. The Committee enquired how the list of people who should receive proactive calls was drawn up. It was noted that the vulnerable people list was provided by Customer Services. Some of the list was out of date and it took 3 to 4 days to cleanse or clear the data to establish who should be contacted. There was cross referencing with Surrey County Council's shielded list and the default position if people could not be contacted was to refer the matter onto Surrey Police.

People on the proactive call list were called three times a day. Continual data cleansing took place through cross referencing and it was decided that there was no need initially to check with Surrey Police on the lists that they might have. However, an RBC officer witness informed the Committee that there was little feedback from Surrey Police on the action that they took if matters were referred onto them and there was no collective agreement on the point at which all agencies would have to stop trying to contact people who were proving very difficult to contact. A RBC officer witness also reported that there was a disconnect between the officers of the Surrey Local Resilience Forum and the various teams working on the coronavirus response in the various Surrey district Councils. By using five or six different databases in Customer Services it was possible to establish who should be contacted. There was a close link between Customer Services and the welfare cell, which included some Customer Services Staff. There was also a good working relationship between Surrey Police and the welfare cell. By the time of the Easter weekend, Customer Services and Surrey Police were updating each other on the various lists that they had. On some occasions, Surrey Police might have more recent information than Customer Services and vice versa.

At its first meeting on the Coronavirus response on 2 July 2020, the Committee decided that it would wish to look in more detail at one of the recommendations in the draft Coronavirus Response Debrief Report. This was recommendation ix of the recommendations to the Surrey Local Resilience Forum which was phrased as follows; - "ix – Improve process for welfare visits – include 'sorry we missed you' cards from early on rather than triggering multiple PCSO visits unnecessarily as some people prefer to call back rather than answer unknown number calls". The Committee noted that the key words in this recommendation were "from early on". This process had not been followed at the start of the response, but the lesson had been learned and the process had been put into practice later on in the response.

It was noted that there had been 2,000 calls for Customer Services over a 3 day period – this would normally be the number of calls received during an entire month. Calls were process mapped into three main categories – finance, food and medication. Customer Services worked with Voluntary Support North Surrey who provided volunteers.

It was noted that the range of matters dealt with in the various calls included a number of safeguarding issues including neglect and ill treatment – these types of cases were escalated or referred to Surrey County Council Adult Social Care or to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). Domestic violence issues did not occur in the various calls. Community Services had a good relationship with Adult Social Care. It was noted that some of the people on the vulnerable people list might have included people resident in care homes. The care homes had responsibility for their residents and care homes were a Surrey County Council function.

Customer Services were open for 7 days a week and people were contacted by writing to them, by social media and by the Council's website. Customer Services worked with the emergency foodbank which was set up at Unit 9 Egham Business Park which became

known as the “warehouse”. Various issues were referred to Community Services and Customer Services by the volunteers, some of which were also referred on to Adult Social Care. There was an awareness throughout of the need to be careful about what information could or could not be shared. As time went by, issues were dealt with more quickly through having experience of them previously in the response. Community Services were represented on the County wide welfare cell, where it was considered that Runnymede had provided a particularly effective and speedy welfare response. On Easter weekend, shielded data had been released and RBC had contacted 2,000 people. The Chairman reported that from his discussion with Members of other Surrey districts, that the general consensus was that Runnymede’s welfare response had been of high quality and swift.

It was noted that RBC had contacted vulnerable and shielded people but had also written to the whole population of Runnymede to invite them to contact RBC if they had an issue arising out of the pandemic where RBC could help. As a result, people of all ages and with all kinds of needs had been assisted, across all types of demographic profiles.

The Committee went on to consider the effectiveness of the partnership working with the foodbank and the effectiveness of the partnership working with the official volunteers, as set out in the terms of reference. In order to assist the Committee with its review of these various matters, it received verbal contributions from two RBC Member witnesses, Councillor Theresa Burton and Councillor Nigel King and from a member of the public who was an official volunteer, Spencer Doran. The Committee was pleased to welcome Spencer Doran to the meeting. The Committee agreed that its terms of reference should be extended so that they included the effectiveness of the partnership working with official and unofficial volunteers.

The Committee noted that the emergency foodbank established at Unit 9, Egham Business Park, which became known as the “warehouse” had received volunteers from Neighbourhood Support Groups and had a one year lease which had been negotiated with RBC’s Commercial Services. Food had been bought from the wholesale industry which had a 3 or 4 year expiry date, as for a time the food supply retail chain had been severely adversely affected by the pandemic. Other food had been obtained from the hospitality industry which had lost its normal market because of social distancing. The wholesale package sizes that were bought were huge. The foodbank liaised with the welfare cell. Over 600 Foodbank parcels had been delivered by Councillors and by volunteers. Good relationships had been established by Councillors with local supermarket managers and staff in order to bulk buy food. Money had been raised from a variety of sources, including the Wentworth Estate and a Virgin money webpage. It was noted Community Services officers had worked extremely long hours and had showed great flexibility in responding to the Covid-19 crisis.

There were four different types of food pack depending on household size – most were delivered to single person households. As a number of people aged over 70 had to go into isolation, younger volunteers had come forward, who had phoned people to establish what else they might need including cat and dog food and personal hygiene products. The foodbank worked with other foodbanks in Spelthorne. Eight or nine hour shifts were worked at the foodbank and great attention was given to using gloves and masks with a determination that Covid-19 should not infiltrate into the Foodbank. Councillors had worked together regardless of party affiliations.

It was noted that, until the Covid-19 crisis, foodbanks had relied on donations. The warehouse had had to obtain food from wholesalers and had had to move from a collection model to a delivery model. It took time to drive to people’s houses to deliver the packages. In Elmbridge there were four emergency foodbanks which, to an extent, conflicted with each other – Runnymede had the benefit of just one emergency foodbank. An expert had helped with the logistical design of the warehouse.

At its peak, the warehouse was delivering 125 packs a week. Currently it was delivering approximately 50 packs a week. Customer Services had triaged efficiently to ensure need was delivered where it was required and on level of urgency. Templates had been prepared for the operation of the emergency foodbank which could be used for any future crisis.

People were helped by the foodbank who would not normally use such a facility. Some did not have financial problems but could not get out to buy food because of shielding. Others had been furloughed or made redundant. Lessons had been learned from the previous emergency in Runnymede which was the widespread flooding of 2014. There was a volunteer community in Runnymede that would help in any way that they could in a crisis, and there was a “can do” culture rather than an excessively risk averse culture and a willingness amongst Councillors, officers and volunteers to come together to solve problems.

It was noted that the foodbank had been invaluable to Community Services in that it gave them one less problem to deal with as they knew that people would be able to get food. It was noted that the warehouse had a one year lease and if it was necessary to continue in that location Council Members would seek to obtain an extension if required. It was intended eventually to move to a smaller unit if possible. Councillors were working with the charity that ran the foodbank and had not taken over the running of it and a governance panel had been set up to assist the foodbank and to ensure effective joint working.

The vital role played by the Neighbourhood Support Groups in providing volunteers for the coronavirus response was noted. Nine groups had come together which covered the whole borough and they liaised twice a week on MS Teams. Voluntary Support North Surrey had supplied 950 separate volunteers. Over 650 ID cards had been produced. RBC’s Finance officers had provided support regarding the reimbursement of volunteers. The Committee noted the importance of keeping the extensive Runnymede volunteer pool together for any future emergencies.

The Committee noted testimonies received over the telephone from people receiving support from RBC during the coronavirus pandemic consisting of proactive welfare call recipients in the vulnerable people and shielded categories and Meals on Wheels recipients. These testimonies showed that people appreciated greatly that their welfare was being checked on and that assistance was provided to them if required during an emergency.

It was agreed that the Debrief Report would be updated to reflect the matters discussed at the meeting and would be considered further at the Committee’s next meeting on 21 July 2020. The Committee expressed its appreciation in particular for the work of the RBC Community Services, Customer Services and Environmental Services sections in the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It also congratulated everyone involved in the response for their excellent and exceptional work in meeting the needs of the people of Runnymede in an emergency.

RESOLVED that-

the Debrief Report be updated following the evidence heard at the meeting and the Terms of Reference be extended to include the effectiveness of the partnership working with official and unofficial volunteers.

(The meeting ended at 7.38 p.m.)

Chairman