

Runnymede Borough CouncilOVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE21 July 2020 at 6.00.p.m. via MS Teams

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

Members of the Committee absent: Councillors M Brierley and S Mackay

Councillors T Burton, M Heath, I Mullens, J Olorenshaw and N Prescott also attended.

110 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 2 and 14 July 2020 were confirmed as correct records. As the meeting was being held remotely using MS Teams, the Chairman would sign these two sets of minutes when this was physically possible.

111 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S Mackay

112 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 third 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 and 14 July 2020 should be amended or whether any additional recommendations should be made in the Report.

The Committee had at its previous two meetings received information on the exact work Officers and Members had undertaken during the peak of the pandemic. Officers were now looking and preparing for the future by considering actions to take for a possible second wave of the pandemic. To improve, Officers felt that the MHCLG was of particular importance as it needed to disseminate information to local authorities quickly, particularly in relation to PPE. It was also felt that central government should give more responsibility and enabling powers to local government, which would be more effective. Officers were currently working with Applied Resilience on an Action Plan for a second wave. In general, feedback from residents on the co-ordinated effort at Runnymede had been very good.

The Committee was concerned to learn that due to a national data sharing arrangement not being in place, local authorities were unable to obtain local COVID results. This data would be crucial in monitoring a potential second wave of the virus and therefore strongly felt that central government should look at allowing this data to be shared as a matter of urgency, this was vital in controlling the spread of the virus.

Members received an update from the Corporate Head of Customer, Digital and Collection Services. The Committee was pleased to note that due to the introduction of Citrix and Microsoft Office 365 in December last year from a technical point of view Runnymede had fared well. At the peak of the pandemic over 200 staff were working from home. Unfortunately, the telephony system however is over 15 years old and some difficulties with 'hunt calls' had occurred. This meant that FOH had taken over managing calls on a

temporary basis. The Committee thanked digital services for all their hard work and felt the department's response had been excellent and they should be commended.

The Committee received an update from the Corporate Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development. On being asked what might be improved upon if there were a second wave of the virus, the Corporate Head of Human Resources and Organisation Development suggested that the time should be used to expand out the number of staff who could be used for the on-site welfare cell and vulnerable people calls. This would ensure that not only more staff were available as needed, but they had the right skills and qualities for the specific roles. Training would also be provided. With regards to the recommendation in the agenda that agile working should be introduced from 1st April 2021, the Committee was advised that the telephony system needed to facilitate an adequate telephony service for home working. Digital Services were commencing the procurement process in the autumn and the new system would not be implemented until December 2021. At present, staff working from home had to switch their phone extension to their mobile or home phone and that had caused issues for some staff. However, work was progressing on agile working. At present, a questionnaire was being drafted to send out to all Managers to establish which roles were suitable for home working and which were not. Whilst the Committee supported this, they asked Officers to send the questionnaire to other Officers too to get a broader indication of how home working worked for them. It was noted that staff working on emergency situations such as the pandemic did so on a volunteer basis, it was not written into staff contracts. Whilst most staff approached helped, a minority were unwilling to work outside their homes on emergency work due to fear of being infected. It was also noted that some staff had declared medical conditions/caring responsibilities which HR had not previously been made aware of.

The Committee noted the list of essential services which continued to be carried out as well as delivering the COVID response. Of particular note, was the refuse/waste collection service, in order to maintain social distancing in refuse vehicles, community buses had been utilised to transport refuse collectors between rounds.

Councillor Prescott, Leader of the Council wished to thank everyone for all their efforts including: SLT, Officers, Members and Volunteers. He felt Runnymede responded excellently to the pandemic with a true can-do attitude. He particularly wanted to thank those who had gone 'above and beyond' and it was hoped that their efforts could be in some way rewarded in due course. He stressed again the importance of COVID cases being shared in future when dealing with potential smaller localised lockdowns. He felt the thoroughness of the review had been very good.

It was noted that whilst some Members had been involved in dealing with pandemic, it was appreciated that some had medical conditions which prevented them from assisting. However, every Member who could help did so with some going 'above and beyond'. Members felt that the day to day working with Officers worked well and Members all worked together whatever their political persuasions.

It was noted that after the flooding in the borough in 2014 it was agreed in emergency situations there should be a Member Liaison Officer (MLO). The MLO would be the designated Member who would disseminate information out to each party. This had not occurred at every stage during COVID. The Chief Executive felt the idea of an MLO was good one and would review to ensure ongoing communications.

With regards to working with partners it was noted that on the whole good collaborative working had taken place and information needed from SCC, for example, was forthcoming.

Members appreciated the daily update email they received from the Corporate Head of Business Planning and Performance Review and the Chief Executive expressed his thanks for all her work and proactive communications to Members.

Regarding internal governance and monitoring it was considered that a review of the Council's response to the pandemic by this Committee, so soon after the event was very positive. The Advisory Panel had been set up quickly and the Leader of the Council had been very responsive to any calls. It was felt that all had gone well, and a similar approach would be used for another similar crisis with the improvement of the implementation of a MLO.

Members were keen to ensure that staff had been able to take leave. Officers advised the Committee that staff were encouraged to take leave where necessary. Staff had also been given a longer amount of time to take their leave (2 years). A wider cohort of staff would be needed in future which would also broaden staff skills and confidence.

With regards to staff returning to work, whilst agile working may not be introduced fully until December 2021, the way staff worked would now undoubtedly change. Along with this change staff would be expected to respond in case of emergency, which was in most cases something 'inbred' in staff as public servants.

The meeting was closed by the Chairman who wanted to express his thanks to all concerning at the 'amazing' job Runnymede had done.

RESOLVED that-

the amended Debrief Report as set out at Appendix 'G' be approved and recommended to Corporate Management Committee

(The meeting ended at 7.16 p.m.)

Chairman