

Cabinet
19 May 2020

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the CABINET held on Tuesday 19 May 2020 at 5.00pm.

This Cabinet meeting was held remotely in line with new regulations passed under the Coronavirus Act 2020, using the Zoom application.

These regulations have been passed under to ensure Local Authorities can conduct any necessary business under the current public health emergency.

PRESENT: Councillors T.Kingsbury (Leader of the Council) (Chairman)
D.Bell (Deputy Leader and Executive Member, Resources)

S.Boulton (Executive Member, Environment and Planning)
T.Mitchinson (Executive Member, Leisure, Culture and
Communications)
N.Pace (Executive Member, Housing and Community)
B.Sarson (Executive Member, Regeneration, Economic
Development and Partnerships)
F.Thomson (Executive Member, Governance, Public Health
and Climate Change)

OFFICIALS Chief Executive (R.Bridge)
PRESENT: Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) (N.Long)
Corporate Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) (K.Ng)
Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) (S.Russell)
Head of Law and Administration (M.Martinus)
Head of Policy and Culture (P.Underwood)
Governance Services Manager (A.Marston)

Cabinet Members expressed their thanks to everyone again for working hard to keep us and our communities safe in this current time.

129. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 April 2020 were approved as a correct record and noted by the Chairman.

130. ACTIONS STATUS REPORT

The status of actions agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 7 April 2020 in the report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) was noted.

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131. ITEMS REQUIRING KEY DECISION

The following items for decision in the current Forward Plan were considered:-

131.1. COVID-19 Financial Impact Update 2020/21 (Forward Plan Reference FP979)

Report of the Corporate Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) on the Council's financial impact due to COVID-19.

(1) The Decision Taken

RESOLVED:

- (1) Cabinet agreed to delegate authority to Corporate Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) and Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and Executive Member (Resources) to determine the allocation of the £1.28m of un-ring-fenced funding in line with the budget pressures set out in section 3 of the report.
- (2) Cabinet agreed to delegate authority to Corporate Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) and Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader, Executive Member (Resources) and Executive Member (Regeneration, Economic Development and Partnerships) to determine the distribution of support using funding from Central Government to businesses and Council tax payers.
- (3) Cabinet noted the letter shown in Appendix A from the Leader of the Council sent to the Secretary of State seeking his commitment to provide further funding for local authorities to alleviate COVID-19 related income and expenditure pressures.
- (4) Cabinet noted the estimated financial impact outlined in the report and this was subject to change as the government makes further policy announcements.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

The report outlined that the significant financial impact that the Council is facing due to COVID-19. The impact is estimated to be £7M, which is mainly due to loss in fees and charges income and increase in cost of our homelessness service provision. To date, the council only received £1.28M of non-ring-fenced government support, which is considerably less than the shortfall.

The Leader of the Council wrote to the Secretary of State seeking commitment for further funding to local government. The Cross Party

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Finance meetings were being held regularly to keep all political parties informed of the financial pressures that the Council is facing.

Officers will continue to monitor the situation over the next few months, and the Medium Term Financial Strategy will be updated taking account of the final 2019/20 outturn when this is available. A robust financial plan will be put in place as part of the financial resilience recovery group to ensure the Council's financial sustainability beyond the current financial year.

131.2. COVID-19 Recovery Framework (Forward Plan Reference FP981)

Report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) on the draft Recovery Framework for the Covid-19 pandemic.

(1) The Decision Taken

RESOLVED:

- (1) Members approved the structures recommended as the starting point for recovery.
- (2) Members agreed to initiate the process of stakeholder engagement.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

Essentially, the recovery process will have certain key focus points and features:

- Co-ordination – it should act in line with an agreed aim and objectives, and be managed in line with accepted the co-ordination and decision making processes.
- Focus points – recovery should support the restoration of emotional, social, economic and physical wellbeing. A key point here, which is very pertinent, is that the process of restoration may reflect a 'new normality' as for many, life may never be the same again.

In respect of the current pandemic, a Hertfordshire wide Recovery Coordinating Group (RCG) has already been established, chaired by the Chief Executive.

Recovery structures could go live while the response phase is ongoing and at an agreed point, primacy would pass from the Strategic Co-ordination Group and the Recovery Co-ordination Group. The process may be flexible depending on any second wave of the virus and have to switch back to SCG primacy. The situation would be kept under review

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and a Corporate Management Team decision taken to ensure appropriate timing.

131.3. Updated Business Action Plan 2020/21 (Forward Plan Reference FP980)

Report of the Corporate Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) on the approval of the final Business Action Plan 2020-21.

(1) The Decision Taken

RESOLVED:

Cabinet noted and approved the contents of the Council's revised Business Action Plan for 2020-21, and the changes made to it following an assessment of the known impacts of Covid-19 at the time.

(2) Reasons for the Decision

Reports were also presented to the Special Council meeting on 6 May and to the Cabinet on 19 May, detailing both the operational and financial challenges the Council were facing due to Covid-19.

As such, it may be necessary to review the Business Action Plan again when there is more clarity on the extent of Covid-19 impacts on the Council, and when decisions have been made on business recovery across its services.

132. RECOMMENDATION FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The following recommendation from the meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 March 2020 was considered:-

132.1. Retail Strategy

Members of the EOSC Committee agreed a dynamic strategy was needed to help arrest the decline of the Borough's town centres. This would build on town centres being not only commercial but also social meeting places that online can never be.

The strategy would include:

- Working with landowners to provide smaller units to help starter and innovative businesses,
- Learning from and adoption of approaches used elsewhere,
- Working with the local Chamber of Commerce and similar local business support organisations,

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- The presence of an active town centre manager or in Welwyn Garden City, the Welwyn Garden City Improvement District, to bring in the necessary dynamism,
- Closer joint working of the teams whose work affects the town centres,
- In accordance with the Government's own review into High Streets in 2012, this Council maintain free parking in town centres where it currently exists and review the position where there is not.

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and Herts County Council were working closely to plan for re-opening of high streets to ensure they are safe for workers and shoppers. The Council had created a Business and Economic sub-group to consider resilience and recovery action for the Borough.

Councillor B.Sarson, (Executive Member, Regeneration, Economic Development and Partnerships), made it clear that the principle of the motion now needs to be agreed or rejected by Cabinet. This meant that the individual aims do not need to be formally endorsed at this stage but will be subject to scrutiny.

If agreed, in normal circumstances, Officers would have then got on with the task of drafting a Retail Strategy which took account of the issues identified above. In light of the current coronavirus crisis however, Councillor B.Sarson advised Cabinet that corporate recovery and resilience arrangements are being implemented which includes a Business and Economy sub-group. This is in addition to an Economic Resilience Cell which forms part of the countywide response to the crisis, Herts Growth Board and its ongoing engagement with government to agree a growth deal and the ongoing work of WGC Town Centre BID and Hatfield Town Centre Manager.

Councillor B.Sarson therefore considered that the best course of action is that the EOSC motion would be incorporated into the objectives of the Business and Economy sub-group so that it can consider the immediate, short-term and long term recovery and resilience of the borough's town centres, high streets, neighbourhood centres and village centres as part of the wider economy. A timetable for the work and its outputs will be presented to a future Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

Councillors D.Bell and T.Mitchinson agreed that the strategy should be changed to 'Town Centres Strategy' and not 'Retail Strategy' as the strategy looked at improving the Borough's town centres.

RESOLVED:

Cabinet agreed that the 'Town Centres Strategy' be incorporated into the work of the Business and Economic sub-group to consider all the actions in the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee motion. A timetable for the work and its outputs will be presented to a future Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

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133. APPOINTMENTS TO CABINET PANELS, COMMITTEES, BOARDS, AND
OUTSIDE BODIES

To approve the appointments of Members to Cabinet Panels, Committees and Boards as listed in Appendix A to the Agenda Item 9.

RESOLVED:

Cabinet approved the appointments of Members to Cabinet Panels, Committees, Boards, as set out in Appendix A to Agenda Item 9.

Meeting ended 5.22pm
AM