

# Minutes

<b>Meeting name</b>	<b>Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>Date</b>	<b>Tuesday, 23 June 2020</b>
<b>Start time</b>	<b>6.30 pm</b>
<b>Venue</b>	<b>This meeting will be held by remote access - details below</b>

## Present:

**Chair** Councillor P. Cumbers (Chair)

**Councillors**

R. Bindloss (Vice-Chair)	R. Browne
R. Child	J. Douglas
C. Evans	C. Fisher
R. Smedley	J. Wilkinson

**Observers** M. Bowen

**Officers**

- Chief Executive
- Director for Corporate Services
- Director for Housing and Communities
- Director for Growth and Regeneration
- Director for Governance and Regulatory Services and Monitoring Officer
- Assistant Director for Planning and Delivery
- Democratic Services Manager
- Democratic Services Officer (HA)

Minute No.	Minute
55	<p><b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b> Apologies were received from Councillor Elaine Holmes.</p>
56	<p><b>MINUTES</b> The minutes of the Scrutiny Meeting held on 3 March 2020 have a slight amendment to be made, the last paragraph should read Council and not Cabinet.</p> <p>The Minutes of the Scrutiny Meeting held on 3 March 2020 were approved and requested to be signed by the Chair, subject to the following amendment.:</p> <p>Minute number 53. "Members voted in favour of the Scrutiny Annual Report going to Council"</p>
57	<p><b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b> There were no Declarations of Interest to be recorded for this meeting.</p>
58	<p><b>REVIEW OF THE SCRUTINY ANNUAL WORK PLAN AND THE FORWARD PLAN</b> The Chairman confirmed that the Scrutiny Workshop was being held on Thursday 16 July 2020 at 6pm via Zoom where work on the Scrutiny Work Plan 2020 would commence.</p>
59	<p><b>RECOVERY PRESENTATION</b> During the presentation the following points were raised:</p> <p><u>Recovery and Corporate Strategy</u> – presented by the Chief Executive</p> <p>The Chief Executive provided a brief summary of the recovery context. He confirmed that we were still in the response phase and also looking towards recovery at the same time.</p> <p>Recovery would be discussed in the context of the Corporate Strategy which was built over many months up to adoption in February 2020. It provided clear strategic intent, but now needed to be reviewed in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>The Corporate Strategy provided for 6 priorities under the three broad themes of Helping People, Shaping Places and Great Council. The Senior Leadership Team considered that these themes remain relevant, but there is a need to discuss and understand the impacts of Covid-19 on each of the three priority areas and consider how the Council might respond.</p> <p>There would be a presentation for each of the main priority themes with some initial reflections from the Senior Leadership Team. Scrutiny Committee were being asked to provide feedback in order to inform on what is happening in the community, what the main issues are and what can be done to address these issues.</p>

The Director for Growth and Regeneration provided a brief summary on the recovery process and highlighted the following points:

- Currently looking at risk assessments to customers, visitors to staff and members in re-opening services.

The Director for Corporate Services provided a brief summary of the Financial Impacts of Covid-19 and highlighted the following

- The figures are updated on a weekly basis as more information comes through.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- A Member enquired how the Council is preparing to support people after furlough with the high possibility that there will be a number of job losses. The Director for Corporate Services advised that there is no enforcement action being undertaken. Reminders are being issued to encourage those that can pay to pay and those that can't to help put payment plans in place.
- Concerns were raised that in the event the Council decided to sell any of its assets at this time to raise capital or revenue that there would be a significant loss of revenue due to the fall in property values following the impact of Covid-19.
- The Director for Corporate Services advised members that any asset sale would be capital and therefore could not be used for revenue purposes. Due to the current financial climate and the fall in land/property prices, should the Council look at selling some assets it will make sure the business case is right.
- Was it possible to compare collection rates against the last 2 years? The Director for Corporate Services advised that capacity had been an issue, as business rents, various reliefs and discounts had been prioritised, collection was down on council tax and business rates and this will be explored and analysed in more detail but it is too early to say what the bad debts could be.

Members highlighted the following priority areas in the recovery process:

- Support for people in relation to debt and an agreed approach re court action needed to be developed
- Development of a collection strategy and modelling to understand the impact of Covid-19

The Director for Housing and Communities gave a brief presentation on People Priority 1 and 2 to include Physical Health, Mental Wellbeing, the Community and Financial impacts.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- A Member enquired about what plans are in place to deal with the expected increase in homelessness later in the summer, once the embargo on evictions had been lifted? The Director for Housing and Communities advised that applications to the courts from landlords serving notices could not take place before 23 August 2020 and then three months notice had to be given. The Council had engaged with a number of lettings agencies and private landlords in the Borough to understand their position and establish support available to avoid evictions. There was an Officer Working Group looking at options for suitable temporary accommodation.
- The Director for Housing and Communities would look into the possibility that if a landlord no longer wishes to be a landlord whether the council could purchase the property with the existing lease. This would be looked at as part of recovery and shaping ideas and would be brought back to members.
- Following a Member's suggestion the Director for Housing and Communities would look into the possibility of leasing properties from the HMO or the Housing Associations which will be cheaper than using B&Bs for temporary accommodation.
- The Director for Housing and Communities would look into including a statement of intent regarding homelessness into the recovery plans to make it clear the difference between pre-Covid-19 and the current situation.
- The Director for Housing and Communities advised that transit of drugs was far more visible than pre lockdown and the Council would respond in line with its community safety responsibilities.
- The Director for Housing and Communities advised that this is a developing situation in respect to predicting the number of people who are likely to lose their homes both as mortgagees and private rented and the Council would use the next few weeks to get a better picture, locally, of the impact. There had been a fall-off in terms of income collection from council tenants, reminders had been issued and rent letters amended to encourage people to come forward for support.
- Concerns were raised regarding the vulnerable residents should there be a second wave of Covid-19 and a further lockdown. It was suggested that Neighbourhood Watch or other voluntary organisations could provide information on the vulnerable and sick. The Chief Executive advised that planning had commenced for the potential for a second wave, to ensure that the council was prepared and could implement any lessons learnt.
- The Director for Housing and Communities advised that the Place Board is meeting 24 June 2020 which includes MBC, GP practice, Public Health and County Council to discuss the impact on mental health and the general health of the public during lockdown.
- The Director for Housing and Communities advised that the Council would like to hear Scrutiny's suggestions on how best to engage with Parish Councils.
- The Director for Housing and Communities advised that Councils tend to work with Credit Unions as opposed to setting them up themselves, but he would give this further consideration.

Members highlighted the following priority areas in the recovery process:

- Planning ahead regarding homelessness when the embargo on evictions come to an end. The inclusion of a Statement of Intent.
- To look at the options of leasing HMO properties and/or approaching Housing Associations to see if they have any stock they can lease to the Council.
- Request information from private rental sector regarding tenants who are in arrears to better understand the likely impact.
- To investigate how partners will support the Council in relation to the health, mental health and the wellbeing of residents in the borough.
- Further work to understand the possible impacts on anti social behaviour throughout the borough resulting from an increase in unemployment.
- To investigate getting assistance from the voluntary sector i.e. Neighbourhood Watch
- To provide more information regarding release of the shielding category and how the Council will deal with any return to increased restrictions/lockdown should that be necessary.
- How the Council can better engage with Parish Councils including running briefings/workshops
- Explore the option of the Council running its own credit union.

The Director for Growth and Regeneration and the Assistant Director for Planning and Delivery gave a brief presentation on Shaping Places in Recover (priority 3 and 4) including Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality

During discussion the following points were noted:

- The information presented to Members was collected by the Leicester and Leicestershire Partnership.
- There would be a press release going out today showing how the Council is supporting the town centre in reducing any enforcement action on pubs, cafes, restaurants to allow them to use pavements and outside spaces to help increase capacity. The Council is in discussion with the Town Estate and BID regarding this. Planning permission will not required for marquees erected in pub car parks until the end of September 2020, subject to any local disruption.
- There will be a joint effort with landlords and police in regards to the policing of the opening of the hospitality sector.
- Farming and agriculture had been looked at in detail particularly the support from the NFU. There had been a negative impact on our crop and dairy farmers particularly on the supply to coffee shops, the exporting of stilton cheese had been impacted, though Long Clawson Dairy has worked with a few of their suppliers in setting up milk vending machines.
- Lack of availability of PPE had an impact on specialist food production.
- The Federation of Small Businesses had advised of a rise in calls to the helpline for support with (1) Health and Safety, (2) advice about debt and (3) employees and job protection.

- The Council had commissioned a business survey and hope to get the results shortly. This will be repeated throughout the year as the situation will change regularly depending where we are with Covid-19.
- The Council had commissioned a food protection survey.
- The Council can now pursue and prosecute cases regarding fly tipping and the burning of waste.
- The Climate agenda will commence again in July 2020.
- The establishment of a Tourism Forum could be considered, to look at other ways of bringing people into the town other than for shopping. The Chief Executive advised that the Council was due to host a Tourism Forum in April this year but this had to be cancelled due to the lockdown. This would be revisited later in the year and would be encouraging the local entrepreneurs to come forward to be ambassadors to speak to other businesses to encourage investment.
- The Director for Growth and Regeneration advised that the information given regarding the number of people furloughed in Melton had been provided by the HMRC and would clarify if it referred to the number of people who work in the town or the number of people who live in the town.
- The Director for Growth and Regeneration advised that there are going to be some specific sector based webinar sessions with businesses over the next few weeks in order to establish what support could be offered.
- The Director for Growth and Regeneration advised that she is working with LEP who are leading on the economic recovery as coordinated by the Leicester and Leicestershire Residents Forum and looking into business intelligence and working out priorities for different sectors and districts before coming up with a plan to be used to generalise the funding from Government. A plan to tackle unemployment and support entrepreneurship is expected to be in place by October/November 2020. LEP coordinates various groups including Market Town Forums, the Community Safety Partnership and the Skills Advisory Board which enabled them to get actions out in to the community sooner
- Following the announcement today from LCC that there will be no funding for the MMDR, the Assistant Director for Planning and Delivery advised members that there had been no additional time given to this, all work had been done alongside the response on Covid-19.
- The Assistant Director for Planning and Delivery advised that the closure of the local tip was due to the safety of staff, customers and queuing traffic, it is now open with very strict measures in place.

Members highlighted the following priority areas in the recovery process:

- To refocus on tourism with the reintroduction of a Tourism Forum.
- What engagement/support has there been from LEP.
- How to encourage entrepreneurialism and provide opportunities from niche businesses.
- To use Pub Watch/engage with the police and to have a strategy regarding known problem areas within the borough for anti social behaviour.
- To retain a focus on the villages and provide support for village pubs and small businesses.

- To know what support there is for the local farming sector.
- To establish what support can be given to local businesses and to include car parking charges/reduced parking charges.
- The need to encourage planning applications to be submitted and the collection of Section 106 payments.
- To explore the opportunity of collating information through questionnaires to collate databases and benchmarks.

The Director for Governance and Regulatory Services and the Director for Corporate Services gave a brief presentation on the Great Council Community Focussed Recovery (priority 5 and 6)

During discussion the following points were noted:

- The Director for Corporate Services advised that the council would refresh the workforce strategy drawing on the forthcoming staff consultation and the experience of home working and would ensure that there is the correct IT technology in place to carry on in the style that has been adopted.
- The Director for Governance and Regulatory Services advised that the Portfolio Holder for Climate, Access and Engagement is arranging for the senior leadership team to engage with the public to see how they can become more community focussed.
- The Director for Governance and Regulatory Services advised that the Council has looked at ways of reaching out with podcasts, live streams on Facebook or question and answer sessions with the Portfolio Holders and Leader of the Council.
- The Director for Governance and Regulatory Services advised that the Council had been in regular contact with the Parish Councils throughout the lockdown. All Parish Councils are members of the Leicestershire Rutland Association of Local Councils who had been offering training courses and support.
- The Director for Governance and Regulatory Services advised that due to current guidelines regarding the restrictions on meetings indoors and the number of people allowed to gather at any one time, remote meetings were to continue until further notice.

Members highlighted the following priority areas in the recovery process:

- Councillors would approach their own residents to check on their wellbeing.
- To look at the possibility of reducing office space by increasing work from home and to look at improving the IT equipment on offer within the Council or to invest in the ICT strategy for the long term.
- To improve the customer platform for remotely transacting with the Council and to remain flexible about the options for people engaging with the Council to ensure no one is excluded.

**URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business to discuss.

The meeting closed at: 9.00 pm

Chair