

Notes of a remote meeting of the Covid-19 Working Party held on  
Wednesday, 25 November 2020 at 5.00pm.

**PRESENT**

Cllr Sue Austen  
Cllr Ian Bovingdon (Chairman)  
Cllr Charlotte Cane  
Cllr Lis Every  
Cllr Jo Webber

**OFFICERS**

Jo Brooks – Director Operations  
Lewis Bage – Communities & Partnership Manager  
Martin Smith – Business Programme Manager  
Tracy Couper – Democratic Services Manager

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Cllr Joshua Schumann

**1. APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Matthew Downey.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interests were received.

**3. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

It was agreed:

That the Notes of the meeting held on 30 September 2020 be received.

**4. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman thanked Jo Brooks and her Team for the excellent work that they had been undertaking in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the recovery. He highlighted media reports that there was new information or pronouncements on the issue from Central Government every 37 minutes!

The Chairman stated his view that Jo and her Team had demonstrated that they were responding effectively to the pandemic and recovery in this ever-changing climate, to provide assistance and support to the vulnerable and community groups that required it. Regular Briefing Papers were being issued to all Councillors providing useful information on current initiatives. The

Chairman believed that this Working Party had raised important issues and concerns and made recommendations on these to Finance and Assets Committee. However, once the two outstanding issues had been discussed this evening, he considered that the Working Party would have concluded its role and could be disbanded to allow officers to focus on the ongoing recovery work. To demonstrate the ongoing work being undertaken, the Chairman asked the Director Operations, Jo Brooks, to give an update on activities since the last Working Party meeting. Jo Brooks updated the Working Party as follows:

'It has and continues to be non-stop for the recovery group who as you know have developed a comprehensive recovery plan and a local outbreak plan, both of which I have shared with you, based on the needs of our communities and local epidemiology. We are currently awaiting news on what tier this District will be in and on the local vaccination programme.

I would like to share with a flavour of the of the work we have been doing to support local communities:

- Working with community groups to ensure no one goes hungry because they do not have access to food or cannot do their own food shopping or is sick because they cannot collect their medication. (36 residents 3/8/2020 to date)
- Providing digital assistance to those who are unable to use online services to ensure they get the benefits and financial support they are entitled to. (42 residents to date)
- Contacting the clinically extremely vulnerable to identify any support they may need and advise of the support available to them
- Administered, signposted and delivered the following government support packages to
  - Businesses
  - ensure no child goes hungry during the school holidays
  - prevent hardship to those have been requested to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace or required to self-isolate
- developed a Communication plan to encourage the residents to keep up the good work, maintain the low infection rates throughout the district and protect loved-ones a and the NHS this includes:
  - Publication of national messages on Refuse Trucks and Council Vans to extend communication throughout the district
  - An exciting let's protect East Cambs Christmas plan, providing alternative ways to have fun and enjoy Christmas with family and friends – examples include
    - providing a digital list of festive alternatives for all residents and households to enjoy i.e. a virtual Santa's grotto, call from Santa;
    - using the Council's already formed circular walks to create a festive trail and support parish councils to create similar alternatives in their communities;

- Countdown to Christmas promoting the work of our community hubs community groups and the help they have provided this year.
- Developed a template to enable Parish Councils to develop their own COVID-19 response and recovery plans.
- Written to local businesses and provided posters for them to encourage staff to follow the guidance at all times particularly break times and chatting with colleagues.
- Written to every business and provided posters for them to encourage staff to follow the guidance at all times particularly break times and chatting with colleagues.
- We are joined by Public Health at our Recovery meetings to consider weekly surveillance data. We have been allocated a member of the data analysis team to enable us to drill down into areas of higher infection to look at the profile of population so we can target communications where infection rates are higher.
- Developing a Communications Plan based upon our announced tier and a Vaccination Plan identifying potential local vaccination sites and volunteer staffing, in conjunction with our NHS partners.'

The Chairman asked that the thanks of the Working Party be formally recorded and conveyed to Officers for all their work and informative updates on the actions requested by the Working Party.

## **5. IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE BAME POPULATION**

Members received a report detailing the findings from the survey of the impact of Covid-19 on the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community within East Cambs. The Communities and Partnerships Manager, Lewis Bage, reported that the survey had been conducted between 3 to 18 November 2020 and the majority of the responses received mirrored the same concerns expressed by the wider community. The survey results and recommendations arising therefrom detailed in paragraphs 4.2 and 4.3 of the submitted report, would be submitted to the Finance and Assets Committee in January 2021.

In response to a question by the Chairman, Mr Bage reported that at least 9 of the 13 responses received appeared to be from individuals rather than groups, as they included language in the first person.

With regard to the recommendation to develop the East Cambs Co-Ordination Hub webpages to include BAME information, guidance and links, the Director Operations confirmed that this would include information and videos in different languages.

A Member referred to the comment regarding hostile behaviour/discrimination and asked if there was further information on this. Mr Bage stated that the comment had been very vague, referring to a sense of this rather than a particular incident.

Mr Bage confirmed that a list of community leaders/groups in the District was being compiled and that further engagement would be made with these. The Chairman suggested that this be added to the recommendations in paragraph 4.3 of the report before it was submitted to Finance and Assets Committee.

A Member also suggested that ongoing monitoring and initiatives were required due to the likely impacts of the pandemic on people's mental health.

It was AGREED:

- (i) That the findings from the survey of the impact of Covid-19 on the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community within East Cambs be noted.
- (ii) **That the recommended actions set out in paragraph 4.3 of the report be submitted to Finance and Assets Committee.**

## **6. COVID-19 BUSINESS SURVEY RESULTS**

Members received a report detailing the results of the Enterprise East Cambridgeshire Covid-19 Business Survey. Martin Smith, Business Programme Manager, explained the context for the survey that took place over the period 10 September to 16 October. The survey was part of the Council's work with the Business Recovery Group and the responses received were handled by a single officer, in order that a consistent sense of the overall message could be obtained. The survey had not been limited to questions relating to Covid-19, but included questions on Brexit and other key issues faced by local businesses.

A total of 136 responses had been received out of approx. 2,000 local businesses. It was difficult to assess what could be considered as a reasonable level of response, but factors such as closure and furloughing of staff; the requirement for an operational response to the pandemic; and fatigue at the number of surveys/returns required from businesses, meant that this could be considered a reasonable level of return. In addition, the nature of the responses gave a good snapshot of the situation at that point in time and contained no surprises in terms of the impacts experienced. Key issues/concerns included:

- affect on future viability and cash reserves
- affect on skills and training
- need for ongoing support and assistance

These in turn led to recommendations in two keys areas:

Identifying and signposting business to relevant support via key local, regional and national agencies

Work with Central Government, Combined Authority and Chamber of Commerce/Federation of Small Businesses on grant streams and specialist good practice solutions for both Covid-19 and Brexit.

A great deal had been learned from the survey and it was intended to conduct a more focussed follow-up survey in the first quarter of the New Year, as part of the recovery phase.

The Chairman stated that he was reassured that the survey responses were largely what would have been expected and that the key role for the Council was one of signposting and assistance. He commented that it would be important to learn the good-practice lessons from those businesses adapting effectively to the changing circumstances arising from Covid-19 and Brexit.

A Member highlighted the importance of co-ordinating with and sharing the results of surveys being carried out by other agencies. It also was vital to address the issue of how to support training and skills in the recovery phase, as Covid-19 would have a disproportionate impact on the employment prospects of younger people. Finally, the provision of adequate broadband and mobile phone coverage within the District needed to remain at the forefront of the recovery agenda, due to the greater level of home and flexible working resulting from Covid-19. Mr Smith referred to the Connecting Cambridgeshire Strategy for this District published recently and agreed to provide the link to Working Party Members.

## **7. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

Further to earlier discussions, the Chairman thanked the Working Party for its valuable work and stated that he envisaged this being its last meeting, with all operational and briefing responsibilities being transferred to the Director Operations and any residual reporting requirements to Finance and Assets Committee.

A Member disagreed that the Working Party had completed its work at this stage and could be disbanded.

The meeting closed at 17:45pm