

ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT & PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 18th June, 2020
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Gary White (Chair)

Councillors:	Gill Heesom	Dave Jones
	Barry Panter	Andrew Fear
	Marion Reddish	David Grocott
	Amelia Rout	Trevor Johnson

Officers:	Simon McEneny	Executive Director - Commercial Development & Economic Growth
	Daniel Dickinson	Head of Legal & Governance /Monitoring Officer
	Denise French	Democratic Services Team Leader
	Andrew Bird	Head of Recycling, Waste and Fleet Services
	Geoff Durham	Mayor's Secretary / Member Support Officer
	David Elkington	Head of Customer and Digital Services
	Martin Hamilton	Chief Executive

Also in attendance:	Portfolio Holder for Environment and Recycling
	Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth
	Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency

Note: In line with Government directions on staying at home during the current stage of the CV-19 pandemic, this meeting was conducted by video conferencing in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest stated.

3. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 February, 2020 be agreed as a correct record.

4. CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report providing the Committee with a Covid-19 update in terms of the issues arising and actions taken within the service areas that fall under the Committee's remit.

Members' attention was drawn to the appendix to the report which was a discussion paper with Covid-19 implications for this Scrutiny Committee.

Town Centres Reopening:

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency, Councillor Stephen Sweeney advised that shops had reopened from Monday 15 June and there had been a large number of people in town with hotspots around the Sports Direct shop in Castle Walk and the NatWest Bank in Hassell Street. There had also been queues at other banks and coffee shops. Greggs had reopened today but with the indoor seating area blocked off.

The reopening of the town centre had gone really well. Signage had been placed around the town, including on benches.

Car parks had reopened from Monday 15 June for the first time since lockdown and this had been handled really well.

The Chair stated that he had visited the town centre on Tuesday to gain feedback, speaking with shop owners who expressed concerns about the lack of police presence. The Chair asked if there had been any engagement with the police.

Councillor Sweeney advised that there had been a presence on Monday.

The Executive Director for Commercial Development and Economic Growth, Simon McEneny advised there had been engagement with the police but they were unaware as to where there would be queues forming. Two PCSO's were patrolling and had been asked to be in the Castle Walk /Hassell Street area on Monday.

The Chair advised that there had been no police presence on Tuesday and there had been five or so vagrants in the town drinking who had been moved on by the BID. The Chair stated that having police presence in the town would be useful.

Mr McEneny stated that the Council was aware of the situation and had spoken with the police in the last couple of days.

The Chair asked if there had been any feedback from High Street shops as to how the Council was doing and how it could improve or help trading conditions. The Chair stated that the Council should be seen to be being active.

Councillor Heesom referred to the storage area located beneath the Vue Cinema and asked if it was now open as the space was used by market traders. Councillor Sweeney confirmed that it was now open.

Councillor Trevor Johnson stated that there were some people who were not observing the two metre rule.

Mr McEneny advised that there had been a requirement on shop owners and stall holders to try and enforce the ruling and, information had been sent out on how to achieve this. However, there was a reliance on the public to adhere to the rules.

Markets:

Councillor Sweeney advised that the markets had reopened and were picking up rapidly. At the antique's market on Tuesday, almost every available stall had been taken and all were doing good trade. In addition, 'click and collect' parking was being set up at the end nearest to the Nelson Place roundabout.

The Chair asked if the feedback had been positive from the stall holders. Councillor Sweeney confirmed that it had been.

Car Park / Bus Station:

Councillor Sweeney advised that the Midway had opened up on 15 June and that all car parks were now open. There would be no enforcement carried out for the next two weeks, following which, notices would be put up advising that enforcement would be re-commencing shortly.

The new cashless/contactless machines being provided by Capita would take four to six weeks to get up and running.

Councillor Jones stated that he appreciated that enforcement would be light but asked if the non-enforcement period could be extended until contactless payments could be achieved.

Councillor Sweeney advised that the machines would all be cleaned regularly and would inform Members how often the cleaning would take place.

Councillor Rout stated that it would be interesting to see a risk assessment concerning the sanitisation of the car parking machines.

Economic Recovery:

Councillor Sweeney advised that the Council had received £23m to distribute to local companies. Over £19m had gone into the local economy with 1735 companies to date, having benefited.

A £211,000 discretionary fund had been distributed and this funding would be continuing up to 29 June, 2020.

The Future High Street Fund was getting close to completion and Boards for the two Town Deal Funds for Newcastle and Kildgrove had been set up.

The Chair asked when the deadlines were for these funds. Councillor Sweeney advised that the two Town Deal Funds had been put back to October and the Future High Street Fund deadline had been extended from the end of June to the end of July if more time was needed.

In respect of people finding themselves unemployed as a result of the Current economic situation, Mr McEneny advised that the Council was working with

stakeholders across the area and added that a system had been put into place during the last recession.

A meeting would be taking place on 24 June to discuss those affected. Figures for Universal Credit across the Borough had seen a recent dramatic increase.

As the country comes out of lockdown, more redundancies may happen and the Council was working on what support mechanisms and interventions there may need to be. It was still early days and the true extent of the impact would emerge over the next few months.

Recycling and Waste Services:

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Recycling, Councillor Trevor Johnson thanked everyone who had been involved in the rolling out of the new service and stated that at the end of the current period there would be an increased tonnage of materials collected. In addition, once the new collection vehicles arrived, emissions would fall by 50%.

The Head of Recycling, Waste and Fleet Services, Andrew Bird stated that the Covid-19 pandemic had been challenging and the Council's intention had been to keep all waste collection services operating safely.

There had been a 25% loss of workforce through self-isolation or shielding and the decision had been made to cease operating the kerbside separation service as this could not be done with two operatives per cab.

The service was therefore switched to co-mingling using the standard refuse collection vehicles, which had seven vehicles operating each day. However, the materials had to be sent away to be separated and the cost of this was substantial. As a result, the Council looked at introducing the new waste and recycling service earlier than planned.

The collection of food waste was currently suspended but it was hoped that that would be resuming in August.

There had been an increase in waste presented, which had been a national trend, most likely due to people staying at home during the pandemic.

The Chair thanked Mr Bird and his team for the service which they had provided.

Mr Bird stated that the Council had originally intended to roll out the new service in September, with the delivering of the new bins to residents throughout August. The Council had been able to bring the new service forward as the manufacturer of the bins had been able to deliver them earlier than planned.

At this point in time, the distribution of bins and bags had been completed in the south of the Borough and from Monday 22 June would commence distribution in the north of the Borough with it being completed in three weeks' time.

The first two collections of the new service were carried out in the week commencing 8 June. These were carried out in the Silverdale, Knutton, Thistleberry and May Bank areas. From Monday 22 June, the first full week of collections in the southern area would be taking place.

In respect of communicating the new service to residents, a lot was being done on social media and the service also had its own Facebook page.

Mr Bird stated that it was vital that the quality of materials collected was maintained as card and paper were sold separately. Of the ten thousand properties visited for the first two collections, only 200 bins had to be tagged in respect of contamination.

Councillor Panter asked when people would be receiving calendars indicating their collection dates. Councillor Panter also enquired as to what would be happening to the old collection boxes as he had been made aware that an animal charity would welcome as many as could possibly be provided.

Mr Bird advised that leaflets were delivered inside the bins upon delivery. Calendars with delivery dates would be posted through letterboxes shortly after the delivery of the bins.

The Chair raised two issues from the discussion. Firstly that the Council needed to ensure that the leaflets were distributed properly as this needed to be robust. Secondly, the Chair referred to the Council's waste collection web page stating that it asked for your address in order to advise upon collections. The Chair had entered his address to check on collections and the website had indicated that the new bin and bag would be collected, whereas it was still the boxes being collected in that area.

Mr Bird advised that unfortunately the website would not allow for two collection styles.

Garage Workshop:

Mr Bird stated that this was an important area which was 'in the background'.

In addition to maintaining the Council's fleet of vehicles - lawnmowers, tractors and other equipment were kept in working order. The workshop also provided MOT's to the general public.

The largest workload for the garage workshop was that of taxi testing/MOT's although these had been on hold during lockdown. This could start to pick up again over the coming weeks as lockdown eases. However, taxis pose a significant risk in that there is no control over who has been getting in and out and where they have been touched inside by passengers. Methods of sanitisation and personal protection equipment for staff were being considered.

Councillor Johnson stated that as we come out of lockdown there was a need to be more reactive than proactive in terms of cleanliness in the Borough. The Council had kept on top of issues such as fly tipping and summer flowers were now being planted around the town.

The Chair made reference to blocked gullies in the Borough and was advised that they were the responsibility of the County Council.

Development Control:

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth, Councillor Paul Northcott advised Members that the coronavirus had impacted on the number of applications with fewer

having been received. However, the Planning Department had continued dealing with applications throughout lockdown.

Members' attention was drawn to paragraphs 51 and 52 of the appendix which gave the performance by action type for the period 1 March to 4 June and the figures for the same period last year. Councillor Northcott added that he was very pleased with the figures and praised the Head of Planning and his team for their work.

The Chair stated that Newcastle was the first Authority in Staffordshire to hold a virtual meeting of the Planning Committee.

Councillor Northcott stated that virtual meetings did have positive effects in terms of delivery and gave an example of people who were required to attend the Committee to speak on an application may find it much easier to do attend virtually than to travel a distance if they were not local.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That the report be received.
 - (ii) That an update report be sent to committee members one month from the date of this meeting which demonstrates that feedback has actively been sought from High Street shop owners and market traders on the overall position of Covid trading and how the Borough Council can improve or help trading conditions. Actions should be listed and updates given against these actions'
 - (iii) That an update be given regarding police presence in the town and that the Council ask them to ensure that police presence is maintained.
 - (iv) That an update be given on the frequency of the sanitisation of the payment machines on the car parks together with a risk assessment to be carried out and brought to this Committee.
 - (v) That it be ensured that leaflets concerning the new recycling and waste service are distributed correctly and timely.

5. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

6. CABINET RESPONSE

COUNCILLOR GARY WHITE
Chair

Meeting concluded at 8.10 pm