

CABINET

Wednesday, 8th July, 2020
Time of Commencement: 2.00 pm

Present:-	Councillor Simon Tagg – Chair
Councillors	Stephen Sweeney, Trevor Johnson, Mrs Helena Maxfield, Paul Northcott and Mrs Jill Waring
Officers	David Adams, Martin Hamilton, Jan Willis, Daniel Dickinson, Denise French and David Elkington
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 2000

8. **APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies for absence.

9. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest stated.

10. **MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING**

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10th June, 2020 be agreed as a correct record.

11. **BACK ON TRACK THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC RECOVERY PLAN UPDATE**

Cabinet considered a report on actions being taken across the Council to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic and to deliver a recovery plan.

The Leader reported that over recent weeks the Borough had seen the staged reopening of the market and non-essential retail and then the reopening of bars and pubs from 4th July. This had been successfully achieved with support from the Council's officers and the Newcastle Business Improvement District (BID).

The report outlined the five areas of the recovery plan:

Reopening Safe, Successful Retail Areas:

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency, Councillor Stephen Sweeney, congratulated the work of Council staff and partners – including the BID, Police, retailers, publicans – in achieving a successful reopening of retail areas. He had held discussions with the Police following the reopening of pubs and bars and the Police had reported that the picture on 4th July was very similar to a usual Saturday night. Those establishments that used security staff on the doors had operated security arrangements from 8.00pm; the Police had suggested these arrangements would be better in place from 6.00pm and pub and bar operators would amend accordingly. The Leader noted that local pubs in outlying centres had been able to make use of outside space to support safe reopening arrangements.

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Heritage, Councillor Jill Waring referred to Kidsgrove where a number of non-essential retail units had now successfully reopened and this had been supported by both the Borough Council and Go Kidsgrove.

Supporting Health and Wellbeing

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing, Councillor Helena Maxfield, updated on measures to support health and wellbeing. The helpline and online facility continued to operate. The Council would consider continuing the successful partnership working with the Realise Foundation.

The Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Service continued to provide emergency accommodation for 17 individuals along with other support for identified individuals in need.

Economic Recovery

Councillor Sweeney explained that the Council had paid out around £20m to approximately 1700 businesses under the Government's initial grant support scheme. The second allocation of Government grant funding, which was discretionary, had been launched at the end of May and to date around £420,000 had been given out in the Borough. The Leader also referred to specific Borough schemes – the Future High Streets Fund and the Town Deals for Newcastle and Kidsgrove.

Stepping-up Council Services

Many staff continued to work from home in line with Government guidance. The majority of services had continued with minimal disruption. However, other services had been impacted including:

J2 and Brampton Museum - Councillor J Waring reported that Government guidance was awaited as to when J2 could reopen. The Museum would reopen on 20th July with reduced hours and limited numbers and measures such as a one way system.

Licensing Services – the service had focused on support to existing drivers with taxi testing being suspended. Virtual meetings had been held to consider some licensing issues.

There were a number of services where there would continue to be challenges as services commenced a return to normality including:

Homeless support – as required by Government, accommodation had been provided and ongoing support was being given but demand had doubled which put pressure on the service.

Licensing – there was a backlog of current and new driver/vehicle licence applications and a backlog of vehicle inspections following suspension of this service. The process to apply for a licence to serve food and drink outside had been shortened and demand was expected to be high.

Local Outbreak Control measures – this was a new responsibility and demand was unknown; £50k grant funding had been received.

New Recycling Service – the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Recycling, Councillor Trevor Johnson, reported that the new recycling service which was currently being rolled out was running smoothly.

Financial Recovery

The impact on the Council's financial position was outlined. This impact was due to loss of income from services such as J2 and car parking, together with additional costs incurred. To date, two tranches of Government funding had been received in the sums of £1.3m and £65k. In the longer term, there could be an impact through lost income from business rates (due to business failure) and Council tax collection (due to non-payment). The Council continued to lobby local MPs and through national networks to seek Government support to address costs arising from the pandemic.

Councillor Sweeney referred to the amended accounting period whereby the period of publication of accounts had been extended from 30th September to 30th November. The Council's draft accounts would be presented to Audit and Standards Committee for approval on 27th July; the external audit of the 2019/20 Statement of Accounts would commence in July leading up to the production of the auditor's final report. The full Statement of Accounts would then be submitted to Audit and Standards Committee for formal approval on 29th September. Councillor Sweeney drew Members' attention to the deficit of £207k due to Covid-19 and advised that this sum had been transferred from the General Fund Reserve. This meant the General Fund Reserve had reduced to £1.241m which was still almost £800k up on the budget forecast.

Resolved: That the report be noted and the work being undertaken to recover from the pandemic be endorsed.

12. **FUTURE HIGH STREETS FUND**

Cabinet considered a report setting out the key elements of the Newcastle Town Centre Future High Street Fund submission. The report sought approval for submission of the funding bid to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

The Leader introduced the report explaining the project was the centrepiece in the redevelopment of the Ryecroft site. The scheme would contribute to the Council's Corporate Priority of a "Town Centre for All". Indicative plans were presented showing options for each part of the site incorporating retirement living; residential development; public open space; office space; parking; community space; and retail.

The bid represented an opportunity to attract external funding of around £13m. The Council had commissioned public consultation which had commenced earlier in the year with a two day consultation in the town centre. The consultation process had had to be cut short due to the lockdown measures but initial results showed broad support for the emerging themes in the proposals.

Members endorsed the proposals commenting that they would be transformative; deliver on public expectations of what a modern town centre should offer, the 'pocket park' aspect and plaza concept was highlighted and the mix of uses was commended.

The Leader commented that the designs shown were indicative and the Council would be able to guide the design in keeping with the heritage of the area.

The submission deadline had been extended from the end of June to the end of July 2020.

Resolved: That

- (i) the key elements of the Future High Street Fund Business Case submission be noted and approved;
- (ii) the Executive Director Commercial Development and Economic Growth be authorised to work with the Leader of the Council to approve the finalised detail of the Future High Street Fund Business Case bid prior to its submission to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; and
- (iii) at the point that Covid-19 measures allow, further public and stakeholder engagement be undertaken to build on the initial consultation that was undertaken in March 2020.

13. FORWARD PLAN

Consideration was given to the Forward Plan listing upcoming key decisions to be made by the Cabinet.

Resolved: That the Forward Plan be received.

14. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Business.

COUNCILLOR SIMON TAGG
Chair

Meeting concluded at 2.54 pm