
COVID-19 SUB COMMITTEE**DRAFT MINUTES**

From a virtual/remote meeting held on Monday 5 October 2020 at 7pm until 7.36pm.

Councillors present:

Matthew Bedford (Chair)
Chris Lloyd
Sarah Nelmes
Andrew Scarth

Roger Seabourne
Stephen Cox
Paula Hiscocks
Alison Wall

Officers Present: Geof Muggeridge, Director of Community and Environmental Services
 Sarah Haythorpe, Principal Committee Manager
 Mike Simpson, Committee and Web Officer

CRSC15/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

CRSC16/20 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Covid19 sub-committee meeting held on 3 September 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair of the sub-committee.

CRSC17/20 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS

None received

CRSC18/20 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None received.

CRSC19/20 SERVICE RESTORATION PRIORITIES 4 AND 5

The Director of Community and Environmental Services presented the report. He reminded Members that previously, priorities 1-3 had been agreed by the sub-committee which were those with statutory, financial and welfare implications and those services either already had been or were in the process of being restored where they had been suspended. Priorities 4-5 were more discretionary, with less financial and welfare implications.

There was still uncertainty regarding the reopening of Watersmeet as it depended on the receipt of a grant from the Culture Recovery Fund, news of

which was due shortly. The textile collection service was to be resumed. The reports provided were self-explanatory and the Director was happy to answer any questions from Members.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Director of Community and Environmental Services said the reception area at Three Rivers House would continue to be closed at the present time and there would be no immediate return to face-to-face interactions in the building as per the latest guidance from the Government and rising coronavirus infections. A facility would be available at Three Rivers House for members of the public to make appointments to see the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB). This was considered urgent due to the vulnerable nature of most of the CAB clients. There would not be a walk-in service for customers, it would only be by appointment and special arrangements were being made to ensure Covid compliance measures were in place. It was emphasised that senior officers did wish to reopen Three Rivers House when it was possible, and that the situation would be reviewed again at the end of October.

A Member said that the parkrun programme would not yet be resumed at this time, but a risk assessment would be necessary prior to doing so. With regard to Watersmeet, the resumption of film screenings might be a possibility without the grant from the Arts Council and this would be looked into once more details were available. Some sporting events that normally took place indoors would not be permitted due to the Rule of Six.

A Member referenced point 2.9 of the report and the advertising of various secondment positions within the Council, and asked whether they had been taken up. The Director of Community and Environmental Services said there had been several secondments advertised and filled, which were reviewed every two weeks by the Senior Management Team (SMT). In Community Partnerships, the workload was very busy with Covid 19 recovery work, increased ASB cases/reports, the accessing of grants and other funding and the track and trace programme. Details of the secondments would be published in the Members' Information Bulletin in due course.

A Member referenced item 3.1.7 relating to working in partnership with key stakeholders to restore services, and asked how it would happen and if meetings would be virtual. The Director said Community Partnerships and other teams were working with external agencies and partners and meetings were continuing to be held virtually,

With regard to trees and landscapes, the Member asked why Tree officers could not resume site visits as, being outside, the risk was minimal. The Director of Community and Environmental Services said trees that presented a danger were being looked at by officers. The team had experienced resourcing issues over the past months which had affected normal service delivery. The Director agreed that the wording in the recommendation would be reviewed to show that trees which presented a danger would be visited by officers.

On being put to the sub-committee the recommendation was declared carried by the Chair of the meeting, the voting being unanimous.

RECOMMEND:

That the sub-committee recommends the report and appendix 1 Service Restoration Priority Ratings 4 and 5 to the Policy and Resources Committee for adoption.

CRSC20/20 FACE TO FACE INTERACTIONS

The Director of Community and Environmental Services said Council meetings were still taking place, albeit virtually, and this report just covered face-to-face encounters. The return of physical meetings at Three Rivers House was currently postponed due to the recent revised Government guidelines and rising numbers of coronavirus infections, and site visits would not be undertaken if they involved entry into people's houses. Meetings could take place outside only but under the Rule of 6. Face to Face meetings would be allowed by appointment only with the CAB at Three Rivers House during restricted hours due to the vulnerability of the customers. The Council had agreed to resume issuing of taxi licence plates due largely to concerns over public safety and welfare and arising backlog of applications. This would be carefully managed.

A Member asked for an update on visits by Planning Officers in relation to applications. It was advised that the submission of planning applications had increased over the same time last year, and that applicants were now asked to submit more detailed information to support their application. External site visits would continue subject to safety measures being in place, and enforcement issues would also be addressed in person. The Director was unaware of any complaints about the process from members of the public. The Member asked whether an individual could request a site visit if they thought it would be beneficial to the application. The Director advised that there was no right to a site visit to a neighbouring property. The Director of Community and Environmental Services also advised that the appeals process remained as before if an application was refused.

A Member asked whether the three hour slot for appointments with Revenues and Benefits, which allowed five per day on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays was not now happening., The Director said that due to the latest Government guidelines the arrangement had been paused, although it was necessary to remember that the Revs & Bens service was partly provided from the Watford Borough Council offices.

A system was being put in place whereby a dedicated officer from housing and Revs and Bens would be available during the times of the CAB meeting to be consulted virtually if required.

The provision for face-to-face, by appointment meetings with the CAB on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays had been agreed between 9.20am – 12.20pm.

A Member asked whether it would be possible to install plastic screens in taxis for the protection of customers, as is done in Watford, and was informed that Three Rivers was considering linking into that scheme.

A Member asked whether all community toilets in the District had reopened, and the Director said they had not, due to circumstances beyond the Council's control, such as where a venue remained closed. The Chair asked that an email be sent to Members of the Sub-Committee on the situation with the toilets.

POST MEETING NOTE

An email regarding the accessibility of community toilets was distributed to Members of the Sub-Committee on 7 October 2020.

A Member asked what the Council, or the Gold Team, was planning to do about the low percentage of voter registrations in South Oxhey, a situation that was Covid-related as staff had not canvassed the area. At 83% South Oxhey was the lowest in District when it should be at least 90%. The Chair said other wards were also down on registrations due to current circumstances, and the Director said although canvassing was affected by Covid the item was not on the agenda tonight so a response had not been prepared. The Director agreed to take the question to the Chief Executive and disseminate a response as soon as possible.

A Member said the report recommendation should be changed to state that it be mandatory for face coverings to be worn by officers and members of the public when meeting face to face. The Director said it was not essential when meeting outside as long as social distancing measures were in place. He added that it was not possible to insist face coverings be worn because some people were exempt. The Council had obtained a large supply of face coverings so there was no issue in officers accessing them.

It was suggested that the recommendation therefore be amended to say the wearing of face coverings was to be encouraged. Exemptions should be obvious due to the individual wearing a red lanyard. A Member said as lanyards should be worn when individuals were exempt it would be acceptable to challenge anyone without either, and people should be reminded that the wearing of face coverings was for their own safety.

A Member asked if the Council could issue reusable face coverings on cost and environmental grounds, to which the Director replied reusable coverings must be sanitized frequently, and not doing so defeated the object of having them but the Council would endeavor to be as environmentally friendly as possible.

On being put to the sub-committee the amended recommendation was declared carried by the Chair of the meeting, the voting being unanimous.

RECOMMEND:

That external face to face meetings take place with officers and members of the public, with officers being encouraged to wear face coverings where appropriate, that face to face meetings at Three Rivers House be postponed at this time (other than CAB appointments only) and that external face to face meetings requiring home entry be postponed. All to be reviewed at the end of October.

CHAIR