

## **COVID-19 SUB COMMITTEE**

### **MINUTES**

From a virtual/remote meeting held on Monday 16 October 2020 at 7pm until 7.36pm.

Councillors present:

Matthew Bedford (Chair)	Chris Lloyd
Stephen Giles-Medhurst (Vice-Chair)	Andrew Scarth
Stephen Cox	Roger Seabourne
Paula Hiscocks	Alison Wall
Sarah Nelmes	

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Officers Present: Joanne Wagstaffe, Chief Executive  
Ray Figg, Head of Community Services  
Josh Sills, Watersmeet Manager  
Gordon Glenn, Performance and Projects Manager  
Jo Welton, Committee Manager  
Sarah Haythorpe, Principal Committee Manager

#### **CRSC 21/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None received.

#### **CRSC 22/20 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Covid 19 Response sub-committee meeting held on 5 October 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair of the meeting when it was possible to do so.

#### **CRSC 23/20 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS**

None received.

#### **CRSC 24/20 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

Councillor Paula Hiscocks declared a non prejudicial interest in agenda item 6 as she was a Member of the Friends of Watersmeet.

#### **CRSC 25/20 SERVICE RESTORATION GENERAL UPDATE REPORT**

This report gave a general update with an emphasis on Service Restoration Priority Ratings 4 and 5, as well as changes as a result of the recent second lock down announced by the Government.

The Head of Community Services provided some updates to the sub-committee on the work Officers had undertaken:

- Skate parks had been open but were now closed following Government guidance for the second lockdown.
- Play areas would remain open.
- We are suspending volunteering and friends of working group activities following guidance from Countryside Management Service (CMS) to ensure risk assessments are consistent across the District and the County.
- On Animal Welfare visits there had been only a couple of high priority visits that had been made with the police. With respect to the outstanding visits which needed to take place these people had been written to and a number of visits had been booked to take place in the next few weeks.
- For Taxi Drivers and the issuing of plates, 60 plus plates and badges had been issued. The taxi drivers were required to book their collection date and time which takes place every Monday at Watersmeet. Licence Officers were also undertaking checks of the vehicles
- Face to face meetings had been postponed whilst the Council offices remained closed to Council staff. The CAB were able to book appointments with customers on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.
- Visits by Tree and Landscape Officers to look at dangerous trees were continuing along with trees which were being considered for a Tree Protection Order (TPO).

Members asked if taxi drivers had screens in their vehicles to distance them from their passengers. The Head of Community Services said as part of the Travel with Confidence Scheme taxi drivers could attend an optional training course and then apply for £100 of funding from Herts County Council for protective equipment. This is being set up via a service level agreement with Watford Borough Council.

Members asked if taxi drivers were wearing face masks.

A Member said on the residents live skills, the report said we had received funding from the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) could Officers state how much had been received.

Members asked Officers for more details on which groups had benefited from the DEFRA funding and if any groups had been approached but had turned down the funding. Regarding the Mental Health Officers work, Members asked for information on how much demand had increased regarding Mental Health issues and how we were meeting that need.

The Head of Community Services said that Officers would provide a written response to the Members questions.

Post meeting note on the DEFRA funding:

- How much was the money? We received £10,000 from DEFRA, of which we have retained £500 for admin costs.
- Which groups benefitted? We've given £3,000 to ASCEND to extend the Step In Food hub availability to all residents within Three Rivers. This food hub works on a donation system, and they're monitoring use to ensure the system is not exploited. South Oxhey food bank have been given £4,500.

We're having talks with One Vision regarding the remaining £2,000.

- Who turned it down? We had originally offered a proportion of the funding to the Mill End Community Trust.
- Who is getting the turned down money now? The funding has been shared between the South Oxhey foodbank, ASCEND and possibly One Vision

Did Officers have a contact number for residents who had small businesses?

Post meeting Note: The Interim Director of Finance had spoken to the Chamber about the new grants programmes and we would work with them to promote it. This has also included a conversation about any types of businesses that are being particularly hard hit but not covered by statutory grant. The Director had also linked, at their request, the Chamber with the Watford Chamber so that they can take advantage of their umbrella Kickstart scheme.

Could the results of the annual shopping survey be provided to Members?

Post meeting note: The Head of Planning Policy & Projects said that the results of the annual shopping survey will be published in November's Members' Information Bulletin.

Are we liaising with the shops in our High Street as we may be able to help them and stop them from closing?

Post meeting note: With regards to liaising with the shops in the High Street, it is understood that the Environmental Health team have had some contact.

It was advised that all taxi drivers were expected to wear face masks under the Government Guidelines.

Post meeting Note: Mental Health Wellbeing – full time worker

- Do we know how much demand has increased? During 2019-20 the community support service received 132 referrals. At the end of Q2 this year the service has received 85 referrals so far this financial year.
- How did we identify a need for the worker? At every Adults with Complex Needs meeting, partners reported seeing a deterioration in the mental health of clients, those who had recently stabilised were becoming very complex with no face to face support.
- How will we meet the increase in demand? We did this by expanding the service by an additional full time worker?

Members said that people who are presently participating in the Arts on Prescription scheme had said that they would not participate if it reverted back to being an online course. The Council needed to look at how we can support people with Mental Health issues.

The Head of Community Services said Officers were aware of the benefits of the scheme.

Post meeting note: Arts on Prescription is currently delivered across the district and has previously been delivered in South Oxhey. The current course was due to take place in Rickmansworth, but due to restrictions, it could not go ahead. Each course is intense and can only be delivered one at a time – there are usually 3 blocks of 12 weeks delivered each year.

The Chair requested that Members of the sub-committee raise detailed questions with officers in advance of the meeting so that information could be prepared in advance (to avoid having to have written answers after the meeting).

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

RECOMMEND:

Agreed to recommend the General Update report to the Policy and Resources Committee for adoption.

## **CRSC 26/20 WATERSMEET REOPENING REPORT**

This report outlined the current plans to reopen Watersmeet following the successful award of a £175,000 grant from the Culture Recovery Fund administered by Arts Council England.

The Watersmeet Manager advised the Culture Recovery Fund grant will enable Watersmeet to reopen supporting the fixed running costs of the venue, allowing Covid Secure measures to be implemented, and to subsidise a live theatre programme. The conditions of the grant stipulate that the money must be used to cover costs during the period 1 October 2020 – 31 March 2021.

The original intension was to reopen Watersmeet on 12 November, however due to the announcement of the current national restrictions these plans have been postponed.

Currently cinemas and theatres are allowed to reopen from 3 December, and so we intend to reopen Watersmeet from this date with our first hire booked for Monday 7 December and our first film scheduled for Wednesday 9 December. Initially the programme in December will consist primarily of films and live theatre screenings as these offer more flexibility and less financial risk should any extension to the current restrictions be announced or further new restrictions imposed.

Members asked if there would be screens separating customers going in and out of the building. The Watersmeet Manager said that a number of Covid secure measures had been implemented. The seating capacity had been reduced to 207 seats from the usual 515. There would be a one way system introduced for entering and leaving the building. The main entrance would be used to enter the building and the fire exits would be used to exit the building to avoid any cross over. Hand sanitiser stations would be available throughout the venue. There would also be signs throughout the building advising customers of the three key Government messages, maintain space, wear face masks and wash hands. Plastic screens were being put in at the box office and in front of the bar. An app would be used for people to order drinks from their seats instead of queuing at the bar. There would be no seating in the foyer area.

Members raised concerns that the use of the app may result in the loss of sales of drinks as some customers would not be able to use the app. The Watersmeet Manager advised that staff would be able to take orders manually and then deliver the drinks to their seat. There would be the required spacing between the rows as a result of the reduced capacity and that would make it easier to deliver the drinks and take orders. The seats arm rests and key points of contact would be cleaned after each film or event. Masks would be compulsory unless people were exempt and would be available to purchase at the venue if people arrived without one. Stewards would ensure that visitors

followed the correct route into and out of the building and would monitor the number of people going into the toilets to ensure social distancing is maintained, and after each film showing the toilets would be cleaned.

Members asked if Watersmeet could be used as a venue for Arts on Prescription sessions.

The Head of Community Services said they can discuss this with the Arts Development Officer as it is very resource intense. The principle of holding such events at Watersmeet should not be an issue but to be aware that the Officer is Part time.

Post meeting note: The Head of Community Services confirmed that Watersmeet will be the Rickmansworth location.

Members asked how the £175,000 grant would be spent.

The Watersmeet Manager said a large proportion would be spent on the basic fixed cost of running the building such as utilities and staff salaries etc., with the remainder on Covid Secure set up costs and supporting a live theatre programme. The Arts Council understand the money is there to support venues during this period and there was some flexibility on how to use the funding. Watersmeet had been provided with 90% of the funding and a report would be sent to the Arts Council before the final 10% was released to let them know what Watersmeet would be doing. Part of this requirement was to let the Arts Council know that we are complying with all of the elements of the funding.

The Watersmeet Manager said the wearing of masks would be compulsory for people entering the building. For those people who were medically exempt from wearing a face mask they would be given an exception badge to avoid any embarrassment from other members of the audience.

Members were concerned regarding those exempt from wearing masks and how they can prove they are exempt.

The Watersmeet Manager said that communication would be clear by informing people when they book tickets that wearing a mask is compulsory. In terms of people providing proof of exemption there is nothing Watersmeet can specifically ask for to prove they are exempt. Customer compliance will be monitored once the venue reopens.

Members pointed out that a lanyard is issued from the .Gov.uk website for exempt people.

Members said that it should be made clear that people should arrive wearing a face mask or have a lanyard stating they are exempt and if these are not met no entry would be allowed.

The Watersmeet Manager said he would look into the detail around the regulations for face mask exemption and seek to implement those.

Members thanked Officers for all their hard work.

**RECOMMEND:**

Agreed to recommend the Watersmeet Reopening report to the Policy and Resources Committee for adoption.

**CHAIR**