

ELECTED MEMBER SOUNDING BOARD

Minute of Meeting of the Elected Member Sounding Board held virtually via Microsoft Teams on Friday 24 April 2020 at 1.00pm.

Present: Councillors X McDade, P Barrett, J Duff (substituting for M Lyle), G Laing and C Stewart; K Reid, Chief Executive; B Renton, Gold Commander

In Attendance: S Hendry, Corporate and Democratic Services.

1. NOTE FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

The note from the previous meeting of 17 April 2020 was submitted and approved as a correct record.

Councillor Stewart referred to a question that hadn't been recorded in relation to contingency and emergency planning during the current crisis period. KR confirmed that various communications had been issued to relevant parties on appropriate methods during the current crisis.

2. MATTERS ARISING

Members asked for updates in the following areas:

- Use of Visor Masks – KR confirmed that this was an issue being discussed at national level involving SOLACE in terms of specific standards and quality of visors, further information was expected in due course.
- Staff guidance on developing virus symptoms – KR confirmed that various guidance had been issued to all staff, and BR reported that risk assessments were also in place for staff.
- Fly-tipping – KR confirmed that a lot of discussion had already taken place via social media on this area, and further communications would be issued the following week. SOLACE was also discussing the issue. Councillor Barrett suggested using the Westbank Team to assist with Fly-Tipping issues, BR agreed to investigate this.
- BR confirmed that officers were starting plans for the gradual re-opening of recycling centres in the event that the current lockdown measures are partially relaxed in the future.
- Further to discussion at the previous meeting on Gold Command setting up a single conduit for elected members to make contact regarding community volunteering and support, KR stated that this would be set up as soon as possible. BR confirmed that the Welfare Volunteering Group were continuing to work on the co-ordination of both Perth and Kinross Council and local community volunteers. Work was taking place with PKAVS and Scottish Government, and a leaflet would be delivered to all addresses in relation to support available in the community. In relation to a discussion regarding issues with Royal Mail, Councillor Stewart would discuss this further with BR in terms of possible solutions, if required.

3. OPERATIONAL UPDATE

KR / BR advised members of the following in relation to the latest position on the response to the Coronavirus situation:

- KR advised that a Care Home Action Plan was in place involving the Health and Social Care Partnership, Public Health, as well as the Care Inspectorate. Approximately two thirds of care homes in Perth and Kinross had been contacted so far by the Council in relation to general support and supplies of PPE. It was noted that the Council's guidance in relation to PPE had been recognised as good practice at national level. Following a query by Councillor Laing in relation to privately operated care homes, KR confirmed that whilst the Council issues specific guidance, it is the duty of the individual care home employer to undertake a risk assessment and manage the process as necessary. KR would seek any further update from the Chief Officer/Director – Integrated Health and Social Care.
- KR confirmed that a further Children's Activity Centre was opening in the coming week at Aberfeldy, and increased provision was also being provided at North Inch Community Campus.
- In terms of business grants, KR confirmed that as of the previous day, 2720 applications had been received and 2212 had been processed. Councillor McDade commented that there had been positive feedback at a national level on the PKC approach to business grants during the current crisis.
- KR reported that the early release of some prisoners would commence from 30 April 2020. This was being co-ordinated by the Scottish Prison Service and would involve approximately 450 people across Scotland, with around 10 people in Perth and Kinross.
- KR informed members that the Scottish Government had announced changes in the timescales for decisions by the Council on any school placing requests for session 2020/21 and any subsequent placing request appeals.
- KR informed members that a staff pulse survey had been issued yesterday to obtain feedback from all staff.
- KR confirmed that as previously advised, Beechgrove House was now ready to be used as a step-down facility for patients being discharged from hospital who were not quite ready to return to their own homes. It was noted that this facility was not being used for any patients who currently were infected with Coronavirus. Following a suggestion by Councillor McDade, BR agreed to arrange further corporate communications around this at the appropriate point. Councillor Laing raised concern about any former Coronavirus patients moving to Beechgrove House, KR agreed to pass this to the Chief Officer/Director – Integrated Health and Social Care.

4. EMERGENCY POWERS – RECORD OF DECISIONS

There was submitted and noted the record of decisions in relation to emergency powers as of 24 April 2020.

In relation to contract negotiations with Stagecoach, it was noted that further negotiations were taking place prior to any payment being made. BR advised that Stagecoach were currently transporting 1500 key workers over 29,000 miles.

In relation to the update on support for Gypsy / Traveller communities, Councillor McDade queried if any movement complied with the current rules on social distancing. BR confirmed that guidance had been issued by Scottish Government that PKC were complying with in terms of support for essential services.

5. THE CONTINUING OPERATION OF THE PLANNING SYSTEM

There was submitted and noted a briefing note for members by the Head of Planning and Development on the continuing operation of the planning system.

In relation to a query from Councillor Stewart on deputations being made by the public at virtual meetings, KR confirmed that options for this were being further investigated.

6. LATEST GUIDANCE / LEGISLATION CONSIDERED BY GOLD COMMAND

There was submitted and noted the latest guidance and legislation considered by Gold Command as at 24 April 2020.

It was agreed that hyperlinks to the relevant documents would be provided in future summaries, if possible.

7. FINANCIAL UPDATE

There was submitted and noted a report by the Head of Finance updating members on any significant financial issues arising from the Scottish Government's or the Council's response to COVID-19 since the last meeting of the Board, together with any financial actions taken under delegated authority. The report also provided an update on the financial implications and consequences to date.

KR provided a summary of the report. Following a query by Councillor Stewart on section 3.8 of the report and the figure quoted in relation to reserves, KR advised she would further check this with the Head of Finance. Furthermore, in relation to section 3.13 and the £35k extra on housing expense, BR agreed to clarify the reason behind this figure. Following a query by Councillor McDade on borrowing cost figures from the Scottish Government, KR confirmed that this was being discussed by COSLA and would look into this further. KR advised that she was looking to hold a finance briefing for all elected members regarding the Council's budget position.

8. GOVERNANCE PROCESS

KR advised that it was intended that a virtual Council meeting would take place on 20 May 2020 to consider items on Finance/Budget, updates from sounding board meetings, questions and answers with elected members, as well as a discussion on “building back an even better Council.” It was intended that a further business meeting would also take place in June, and it was agreed that the usual Business Management and Improvement Plans would not be considered at this time due to revisions being made in light of current operations as well as general staff resources. The first virtual Planning and Development Management Committee meeting was taking place on 29 April 2020 and it was proposed that fortnightly Conveners meetings would commence in due course. Following a suggestion that all political groups should be represented at any such meetings in addition to relevant Conveners, it was agreed that this would be further discussed at Gold Command.

It was agreed that a Governance paper with different models/options for decision making would be submitted to the next meeting of the Sounding Board if possible.

9. LATEST STATISTICS

There was submitted and noted the latest statistics as at 24 April 2020.

KR advised that COSLA were working on a central data dashboard and information would be brought to the sounding board when available.

10. MEMBERS Q & A

In response to a query from Councillor McDade on economic recovery planning, KR advised that work was taking place on this and would be reported at the Council meeting in May.

In response to a query from Councillor Duff on issues that had been raised with himself on private water supplies during the current dry period, BR agreed to pick this up offline.

11. FUTURE MEETINGS

It was agreed that future meetings would be moved from Fridays to Mondays wherever possible.