

# **ELECTED MEMBER SOUNDING BOARD**

Minute of Meeting of the Elected Member Sounding Board held virtually via Microsoft Teams on Monday 8 June 2020 at 11.00am.

Present: Councillors P Barrett, A Bailey, J Duff, G Laing and C Purves; K Reid, Chief Executive; B Renton, Gold Commander; S Devlin, Executive Director (Education and Children's Services); K Donaldson, Acting Chief Operating Officer; D Littlejohn, Head of Planning and Development (For Item 9) and G Paterson, Chief Officer / Director – Integrated Health and Social Care.

In Attendance: C Irons, Corporate and Democratic Services.

## **1. NOTE FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

The note from the previous meeting of 1 June 2020 was submitted and approved as a correct record.

In response to a query from Councillor Barrett, BR advised she would follow up on whether any payments had been made locally from the European Social Fund.

## **2. OPERATIONAL UPDATE**

- KR advised that the shielding of people in the most vulnerable group was likely to be continued to the end of July although it was expected that the review of restrictions on 18 June by the First Minister would enable this group to exercise outdoors provided the R number remained below 1. There was no clarity yet on the funding of additional costs to support those shielding.
- KR reported that the Cabinet Secretary for Health had announced there would be enhanced scrutiny in relation to care homes and a weekly performance report to be produced on testing by each NHS Board Chief Executive.
- KR advised that the Test and Protect scheme was being scaled up and the national contact centre would be up and running on 22 June 2020. National and local communications were being prepared for residents to protect against the potential of being scammed. BR to confirm procedures for checking call is not a scam following query from Councillor Bailey on residents calling back the Team. Councillor Purves asked how participation in the scheme would be enforced in Scotland and sanctions available to ensure contact information was provided. KR advised the expectation was that people would follow the guidelines but this was being considered nationally by the Chief Constable.
- KR reported that the free school meals were continuing with fortnightly payments made over the summer holiday period. Clarity was being sought on Scottish Government funding for the totality of additional expenditure of schools returning on a blended learning basis.

- KR advised that the Sheriff Court was resuming this week but the Council were not pursuing outstanding debt or issuing reminder letters in the usual way.
- KR noted that as it was National Carers week from 8 June 2020 a communication was being prepared to acknowledge the work of carers across Perth and Kinross.
- The Office of Statistics Regulations had requested Local and Scottish Government publish information on key areas and this would be available to the media. The COSLA data return also provided a comprehensive overview.
- It was noted the first meeting of the Recovery and Renewal Member/Officer Working Group would be held on 16 June 2020 at 2.00pm.
- KR advised it was intended to restart all Committees in early August and these would be held virtually with hybrid meetings being considered for the future, when it was safe to do so. As a number of staff remained redeployed this would impact on committees so the same range of reports could not be provided and therefore there would be more presentations and verbal updates for items. Councillor Laing welcomed the move forward with regard to holding committees. KR advised there were a number of issues to overcome before hybrid meetings could be held and she was aware that no other Council was considering hybrid meetings for now so virtual meetings would continue. Councillor Barrett raised concerns following the Planning and Development Committee held last week as members were advised they would not be entitled to vote if they had been absent during meeting due to problems with their connection; with regard to public joining to make a deputation, the process should be more user-friendly and there was a time-delay on members of the public speaking which caused difficulties. BR confirmed that feedback from staff indicated the meeting had gone well and people had been delighted they were able to make a deputation. As always, concerns would be taken on board to make process as smooth as possible. It was agreed that KD would raise concerns with Alan Taylor. KR added that there was one-to-one training available from IT and all members were encouraged to do this. While this Council was ahead of many others in being able to hold virtual meetings, improvements would always be looked at.
- KR advised that guidance would be issued to elected members asking them to refer non-covid enquiries direct to the relevant service generic email accounts from 15 June 2020.
- It was noted that fraudulent business grant applications had been received by a number of authorities. As a result, the process had been paused to enable staff to be debriefed and additional training to be provided but it was hoped the process would be resumed quickly. It was noted that self-employed grants may also be affected. An update would be provided to next week's meeting of the Sounding Board.
- BR confirmed that a communication would be issued today advising that all recycling centres would be fully operational from tomorrow and that traffic cones restricting traffic would be removed in the next few days. Information would be issued to Councillors ahead of a public announcement. It was agreed that, in future, elected members would be informed of any embargo on press releases.

### **3. CARE HOMES UPDATE**

There was submitted and noted a report by the Chief Officer / Director – Integrated Health and Social Care providing an update on activity within care homes and a summary of the key information and themes reported to the Scottish Government.

GP advised that guidance had been received last week from the Cabinet Secretary for Health that routine testing of staff and residents in care homes should be undertaken weekly. With 40 homes in Perth and Kinross and 110 across Tayside, this would be a significant undertaking causing issues on delivery and capacity. Sufficient clinical oversight and training of staff would be required for self-testing with a reliance on mobile testing units so further consideration had to be given on arrangements for responding to this request.

With regard to the report, GP summarised the position across the care homes.

GP added that the Office of Statistics Regulations had recorded that Perth and Kinross had the lowest suspected rate of cases in care homes which was testament to the work being done.

With the new testing regime there would be challenges if a member of staff tested positive and consideration would need to be given to moving staff from another home provided they had tested negative. There may be significant staffing challenges across all homes and the need to use further council staff or volunteers to help out.

GP assured that Public Health had confirmed self-testing was no less reliable but training would have to be provided for staff. In response to a query from Councillor Laing, GP confirmed that staff would be required to undertake the test on many residents. A testing team or other staff could be brought in to do the testing but there would obviously be a degree of risk in doing that. GP agreed that the communications to be issued on the self-testing would highlight the fact that staff would also be testing residents. Councillor Barret questioned how robust the testing regime was and GP stated he understood the tests were now checked in a local University laboratory instead of being sent to England so it was a quicker process, however, he would contact Public Health for further information.

Councillor Purves requested the number of beds in each care home to show the scale of potential closures be included in future reports.

It was agreed that information on testing be forwarded to Committee Services for circulation to members.

### **4. FINANCE 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 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.

KD summarised the report, highlighting the following points:

- Additional funding under Barnett Consequentials had been awarded of £4.272m which would be paid in 4 instalments in June
- £1.1m had been awarded from the Scottish Government's Spaces for People Fund
- Projections had been updated to reflect confirmation that LAL; Horsecross and Tayside Contracts had been successful in their applications to access the Job Retention Scheme up to 30 June, reducing the potential cost to the Council of c£1.65m.

## **5. EMERGENCY POWERS – RECORD OF DECISIONS**

There was submitted and noted the record of decisions taken under emergency powers as of 8 June 2020.

KR advised further information on schools would be added into the next report.

Councillor Barrett asked for feedback on collection rates of Council Tax and the number of cancelled or reduced direct debit payments and the impact on welfare rights support. KD advised that Welfare Rights were a very proactive team and were taking action as required. KR stated that Gold Command had taken the decision not to issue the standard reminder letter regarding debt for now and an update would be provided to the Sounding Board on the position with Council Tax payments.

## **6. LATEST GUIDANCE / LEGISLATION CONSIDERED BY GOLD COMMAND**

There was submitted and noted the latest guidance / legislation considered by Gold Command as of 8 June 2020.

## **7. LG COVID -19 DASHBOARD SUMMARY**

There was submitted and noted the latest statistics as of week ending 29 May 2020.

KR stated that the information was based on figures from COSLA and the Council's Improvement Service and there was a time lag on reporting data.

Councillor Barret referred to a number of areas where there were significant variances to the Scottish average such as rent arrears; teachers in school hubs and free school meals. SD advised that in relation to teachers in hubs, Perth and Kinross had 12 teachers routinely operating in the hubs which were predominately staffed by early years; youth development and community and development staff who were contracted to work at weekends, allowing hubs to

be staffed over weekends without a change to contracts. ECS is now looking for teachers to be back in school this month, hence there would be pressure on teachers to be in school and still work in the hubs. SD added there had been a high satisfaction rate from users of the hubs.

On the question of school meals SD advised a decision had been taken to provide all eligible children with meals and had continued to do so but would check why the rate of school meals was 234% and advise Councillor Barrett.

## **8. RECOVERY AND RENEWAL – ONLINE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY – EXTERNAL**

There was submitted and noted the outline of an online engagement survey to be issued to gather information to guide the Council's recovery and renewal. The Sounding Board were asked to provide any comments on this to BR by Thursday 11 June 2020.

## **9. THIMBLEROW**

KR advised that a Special Council meeting would be arranged towards the end of July to consider this development together with a report by SD on teachers returning to schools in August.

KR provided the background to the project with the site initially marketed in 2013. Due to a number of changes to the proposals over the years and also the impact of COVID-19, it was now proposed that the future use of the site be explored in light of current circumstances.

Councillor Laing suggested there was a need to review all capital projects and KR noted that had previously been agreed.

D Littlejohn confirmed that Heads of Terms had been agreed in 2017 but no lease had been finalised. As such, although there was no legal obligation on the Council, there was a moral obligation to advise the preferred bidder of the Council's position. It was imperative that Perth and Kinross was seen as an area open to investors.

## **10. MEMBERS Q AND A**

- (i) Councillor Duff asked if there would be community consultation on returning to school and SD advised Parent Councils/Forums were being consulted by each headteacher. Chairs of all Parent Councils had been invited to a virtual meeting last week and this had had a very high turnout. There would be further consultation school by school with questions submitted to Head Teachers and the Scottish Government guidance together with the Council's framework for returning to school would be made available on the Council's website.

Councillor Barrett asked about the local picture and the willingness of staff for children to return to school on 11 August 2020 and SD

confirmed the matter had been discussed at a virtual meeting of the Joint Negotiating Committee for Teachers (JNCT) but as the start date resulted in the loss of a week's holiday this would be discussed further by the JNCT. It was planned that the school session would begin on Monday 10 August 2020 for teaching staff, which would be an in-service day with pupils returning on Tuesday 11 August 2020. SD added that information had been requested if the return date would impact on teachers' and school staff holiday arrangements and any necessary quarantine thereafter.

- (ii) In response to a query from Councillor Laing, KR confirmed that a request from the Tulloch Community Group and Tulloch Net to make use of the Tulloch Community Centre for siting the community fridge, as the area currently used did not allow for social distancing measures, had been passed to Fiona Robertson and Lisa Simpson to respond.
- (iii) Councillor Barrett commented that he had heard that Morris Young had ceased trading and KR advised David Littlejohn's team would pick this up and that information would be put on the Council's website for staff affected by companies ceasing to trade to promote support and information available.
- (iv) Councillor Laing queried the figure of 42 staff who had been furloughed at Pitlochry Festival Theatre as he understood the figure was actually higher. KR advised that Fiona Robertson would be asked to provide an update to Sounding Board members with information circulated by Committee Services.