

**MINUTES OF THE COVID-19 RECOVERY WORKING GROUP
HELD ON**

14 January 2021

6.30 - 8.03 pm

PRESENT

Committee Members

Councillor Eugenie Harvey (Chair)
Councillor Simon Carter
Councillor Joel Charles
Councillor Tony Durcan
Councillor Tony Edwards
Councillor Andrew Johnson
Councillor Nancy Watson

Officers

Andrew Bramidge, Head of Environment and Planning
Hannah Criddle, Governance Support Officer
Simon Freeman, Head of Finance and Deputy to the Chief Executive
Jane Greer, Head of Community Wellbeing
Simon Hill, Head of Governance
Brian Keane, Chief Executive
Andrew Murray, Head of Housing
Lisa Thornett, Corporate Governance Support Officer

58. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mark Ingall and Russell Perrin.

59. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

60. **MINUTES**

Councillor Johnson requested that the minutes were amended to record the discussion on grants at the previous meeting.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting on 17 December 2020 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair following the amendment to include the discussion on grants.

61. **MATTERS ARISING**

Councillor Johnson asked whether the Council received guidance on the LSRG Grants on 10 December 2020. Simon Freeman, Head of Finance

and Property, confirmed that two sets of guidance were received, the first set on 10 December 2020 and the update and FAQ's on 11 December 2020. Councillor Johnson also advised that he was aware that the testing of the software would have to be completed before the application process could open. Councillor Johnson noted that the application process opened on 8 January 2021 and asked if there were any other delays other than the testing of the software. Simon Freeman confirmed the software was delivered prior to the Christmas period with testing commencing before Christmas. The testing was finished post the Christmas period. A couple of issues were picked up with the software provider and resolved which then allowed the process to open on 8 January 2021.

62. **UPDATE ON COUNCIL POSITION SINCE THE LAST MEETING/RESTRICTION CHANGES**

The Working Group agreed that the purpose of the group needed re-assessing. Councillor Harvey, Councillor Johnson and Brian Keane, Chief Executive, would meet to consider how the group currently works and whether it needed re-adapting in the future.

The Working Group received an update on the Council's position since the last meeting and since the restrictions changed. The update covered communications, compliance, internal council working, HTS operations, business/community and testing/vaccinations.

The Working Group agreed that a stronger message e.g. "Harlow is 5th in Country" needed communicating. The interactive screens around the town centre and shopping hatches would be updated to reflect this message. Brian Keane also agreed to contact the local supermarkets to ask them to consider making announcements in store. Councillor Johnson requested information on the communications directed at businesses about the support and grants available. Overall, the group agreed that the Council needed to consider the ways it was communicating with all types of people and how it could access those people that do not use the internet or social medias.

Councillor Charles suggested that mobile hand sanitising stations be placed around the town centre and local shopping hatches. The Working Group also agreed that all playgrounds would be temporarily closed to prevent groups of adults and children from congregating whilst using the facilities. Councillor Johnson advised that some concerns had been brought to his attention regarding Veolia. This included concerns that two or three bin men were required to share the lorry cab together whilst working and concerns that employees would only be entitled to statutory sick pay if off of work due to Covid-19. Andrew Bramidge, Head of Environment and Planning, confirmed he would investigate these concerns with Veolia.

Councillor Carter requested that the Working Group received copies of the monthly returns that are sent to the Government. Councillor Harvey agreed to discuss this with Brian Keane and Simon Freeman.

Councillor Johnson requested information on how many grant applications had been received from 8 January to date (14 January), how many had been processed to date and how many had been paid to date. Councillor Johnson also asked when the Council expects to process and pay those applications that had been received but not yet processed. Simon Freeman provided figures from when the LSRG and ARG application processes opened on 23 November 2020. Simon Freeman advised that businesses that are eligible for the new “six week lockdown” grant will not need to apply separately for the new grant. Simon Freeman agreed to provide figures for the time period that Councillor Johnson requested.

Councillor Charles advised that some local voluntary groups had raised concerns about the drop off in volunteers and had requested that the Council carry out some more communications on volunteers.

63. **MATTERS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

Councillor Charles requested that the decision to temporarily stop council tenants from moving properties be reconsidered as part of the formal service review in February.

Councillor Edwards noted that an announcement had been made on free school meals recommencing during the February half term. Brian Keane confirmed that discussions regarding free school meals were ongoing and the group would be updated once more information is received.

64. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting is 2 February 2021.

CHAIR OF THE WORKING GROUP