

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

22 July 2020

6.30 - 8.50 pm

PRESENT

Committee Members

Councillor Eugenie Harvey (Chair)
Councillor Simon Carter
Councillor Joel Charles
Councillor Tony Durcan
Councillor Tony Edwards
Councillor Mark Ingall
Councillor Andrew Johnson
Councillor Frances Mason
Councillor Russell Perrin
Councillor Nancy Watson

Officers

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

1. **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Councillor Harvey welcomed the group to the meeting. She explained that the purpose of the group was to work collaboratively, generate creative ideas and have productive debate. Councillor Harvey explained that three key concerns of hers following the Covid-19 pandemic were unemployment, local businesses and the voluntary sector.

2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Charles declared a pecuniary interest as a remunerated Council appointed director of HTS (Housing and Regeneration) Ltd.

Councillor Carter declared a pecuniary interest as a remunerated Council appointed director of HTS (Property and Environment) Ltd.

4. **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The group considered the Terms of Reference that were shared at the Cabinet meeting on 9 July 2020. It was agreed that it was important to complete a gap analysis and to understand the baseline to help to inform the Terms of Reference and establish a feedback mechanism so performance against the Terms of Reference could be compared.

The group agreed to:

- a) Add a term around the Council working with regional health officials to minimise the risk of a second outbreak in Harlow.
- b) Extend the community action term to include community cohesion and wider engagement including public health education and to focus on the impact on the voluntary sector.
- c) Have specific focus of the impact of Covid-19 on the faith based communities and BAME group.
- d) Have a specific focus on public education in view of the on-going health risk.

It was agreed that the action plan should consider dynamic and static risk.

The amended Terms of Reference would be circulated to the Chair and a representative from the Conservative group for approval before the next meeting.

5. **RESPONSE PHASE - KEY ACTIONS AND DECISIONS**

Councillor Harvey noted some of work completed by the Council during the response phase whilst there was a gradual loss of services and the following had been achieved; enabling 420 officers to work remotely, working with the County Council and shielding agencies creating the Community Hub, awarding grants to local businesses, helping 36 rough sleepers, monitoring staff sickness, creating online creative projects, dealing with 60,000 customer enquiries and HTS emergency work during lockdown. The group requested that this information was circulated as a note to all.

The group considered whether the Council was still in the response phase or had moved into the recovery phase. Councillor Harvey advised that the Council was moving into the recovery phase. Councillor Perrin suggested that the details of the response were written down within a strategic framework for comparison against the groups' terms of reference.

6. **RECOVERY PHASE**

a) Workstreams

Jane Greer, Head of Community and Wellbeing, explained that under the “community impact” work stream, there were four key sub-groups;

- a) Third sector, faith groups, BAME and other communities
- b) Homelessness and supported housing
- c) Arts and culture
- d) Data collection.

Andrew Bramidge, Head of Environment and Planning, explained that the “business impact” work stream would need access to better economic data in order to consider the impact on Harlow. He confirmed that, to date, support had been provided to the retail and hospitality sector for the re-opening of their businesses and to 200 Council business tenants.

Simon Freeman, Head of Finance and Property and Deputy to the Chief Executive, detailed the innovative changes made to services as part of the “council business” work stream. The stream had considered 19 actions for immediate action and was aware of where the Council currently stood with its service and where it needed to get for services in the future.

Andrew Murray, Head of Housing, confirmed that, as part of the “HTS Group” work stream, some service provision was moderate and HTS were working its way through backlogs. HTS had worked well with local and trade unions to support employees and get people back to work safely. Andrew Murray confirmed that the Best Value Review actions were continuing for the contract extension. Themes considered by the work stream included; social value impact, business resilience, commercial impact, environmental impact, the customer experience and creating opportunities.

Brian Keane, Chief Executive, confirmed that as of 22 July 2020 he would be receiving postcode data on the positive Covid-19 tests in Harlow.

The group requested a note on the operational, verbal updates of the officers by the next meeting.

b) Development of Action Plan

A draft action plan was due to come back to the group in August for Cabinet approval in September. The group agreed it would like to meet before 25 August meeting to work on the draft action plan. A further meeting would be arranged within the next two weeks.

The group agreed that a gap analysis and baseline analysis would be needed to inform an action plan. Councillor Perrin suggested that sustainability should also be considered as part of the action plan. Councillor Charles suggested that a sub-group for the working group was created to consider the overall vision of a post Covid-19 Harlow.

c) Short Term Measures/Quick Wins

Jane Greer confirmed a number of community impact short-term wins including; the community hub, the planned arts and culture summer events, the planned Black History Month events and the work to allocate discretionary business relief grants. Jane Greer advised the group that Rainbow Services would also be organising a survey to consider how groups had been affected by the pandemic.

Andrew Bramidge explained a number of short-term measures for the “Business and Economic Support” work stream;

- a) Mapping – impact monitoring
- b) Advice and support provided to the business community
- c) The promotion of local businesses
- d) Job skills

It was agreed that a note to all members would include the proposals.

d) Impact on Council Priorities and Corporate Plan

Councillor Harvey confirmed that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Council Priorities and Corporate Plan would be reviewed by September.

e) Finance Update

Simon Freeman confirmed that arrangements were changing weekly, however, the Council would be receiving an additional £165,000 of funding from the Government in a further round of grants announced by Government. The position had not changed since the update to Cabinet on 9 July 2020, however, the additional funding would mean that the gap would reduce to around £500,000. Simon Freeman confirmed that the Council was dealing with a forecast based on what was expected. Councillor Ingall confirmed that the returns information sent to the Government would be shared with the Opposition Group.

7. **MEETING FREQUENCY/NEXT STEPS**

The group noted the dates of the next meetings and requested that another meeting was arranged within the next two weeks. Councillor Harvey agreed to email the group to confirm the process outlined and would arrange for requested documents to be circulated to the group.

CHAIR OF THE WORKING GROUP