

**MINUTES OF THE JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD AT 4:30PM ON
20 MAY 2020**

VIRTUAL MEETING: PETERBOROUGH CITY COUNCIL'S YOUTUBE PAGE

Committee Members Present: Councillors C. Harper (Chairman), K. Aitken, A. Ali, S Barkham, R. Bisby, S. Bond, R. Brown, C. Burbage, G. Casey, N. Day, A. Dowson, A. Ellis, Amjad Iqbal, John Fox, Judy Fox, J. Goodwin, T. Haynes, J. Howard, J. Howell, D. Jones, S. Lane, D. Over, S. Qayyum, L. Robinson, B. Rush, N Sandford, N. Simons, H. Skibsted, S. Warren, C Wiggin and I. Yasin.

Co-opted Members:

Independent Co-optee Members: Alistair Kingsley and Rizwan Rahemtulla
Parent Governor Claire Watchorn
Education Co-optee Flavio Vettese
Education Co-optee Peter Cantley
Parish Councillor Junaid Bhatti
Parish Councillor June Bull
Parish Councillor Keith Lievesley
Parish Councillor Neil Boyce
Parish Councillor Susie Lucas

Also Present: Councillor Holdich, Leader of the Council and Member of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority
Councillor Fitzgerald, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Health and Public Health
Councillor Ayres, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education, Skills and University
Councillor Hiller, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Commercial Strategy and Investments
Councillor Seaton, Cabinet Member for Finance
Councillor Walsh, Cabinet Member for Communities
Councillor Allen, Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Recreation
Councillor Farooq, Cabinet Member for Digital Services and Transformation
Councillor Cereste, Cabinet Member for Waste, Street Scene and Environment
Councillor Bashir Cabinet Advisor for Children's Services

Officers Present: Gillian Beasley, Chief Executive of Peterborough City Council
Charlotte Black, Service Director: Adults and Safeguarding

Will Patten, Service Director Commissioning
Lou Williams, Service Director, Children and Safeguarding
Jonathan Lewis, Service Director, Education
Adrian Chapman, Service Director for Communities and Partnerships
Rob Hill, Assistant Director Community Safety
Dr Liz Robin, Director for Public Health
Steve Cox, Executive Director Place & Economy
Mohamed Hussein, Director: Housing Needs and Supply
Graham Hughes, Service Director, Highways and Transport
Sue Grace, Director, Customer and Digital Services
Amanda Askham, Director of Business Improvement and Development
Peter Carpenter, Acting Corporate Director Resources
Fiona McMillan, Director of Law and Governance
Rachel Edwards, Head of Constitutional Services
Pippa Turvey, Democratic and Constitutional Services Manager
Paulina Ford, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Jane Webb, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Dan Kalley, Senior Democratic Services Officer
David Beauchamp, Democratic Services Officer
Karen S Dunleavy, Democratic Services Officer

The Senior Democratic Services Officer opened the meeting by welcoming those members of the public and press who were watching the livestream of the meeting through the Council's YouTube page. Due to government guidance on social distancing, the meeting took place remotely in accordance with current legislation as laid out in the [Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels \(Coronavirus\) \(Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2020](#) which made provision for remote attendance at, and remote access to Council meetings. The meeting was also following the Peterborough City Council's Virtual Meeting Protocol

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

The Senior Democratic Services Officer advised the Committee that in accordance with *Part 4, Section 8 – Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules, section 13, Joint Meetings of Scrutiny Committees* a Chairman/ Chairwoman would be required to be appointed from among the Chairmen of the Committees who were holding the meeting. It was proposed that, for consistency at these important meetings, the Chairman / Chairwoman appointed at this meeting would also take the position of Chairman / Chairwoman at future meetings of this committee that were held to discuss COVID-19.

Opinions were sought from the members of the Committee in relation to the proposal and as a consensus could not be reached a vote was taken on the appointment of a Chairman for this and any future meetings of the Joint Scrutiny Committee that were held specifically to scrutinise Peterborough City Councils response to Covid-19. The vote 21 for, 8 against and 1 abstention was therefore carried, and the Senior Democratic Services Officer proceeded to take nominations for the position of Chairman for all Joint Scrutiny Committee meetings that would be specifically held to scrutinise COVID-19.

Nominations were sought from those Chairman / Chairwoman present who were Councillor Simons, Chairman of the Adults and Communities Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Aitken, Chairman of the Health Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Harper, Chairman of the Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Councillor Goodwin, Chairman of Children and Education Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Bisby, seconded by Councillor Lane nominated Councillor Harper. There being no further nominations and no objections to Councillor Harper taking the position of Chairman, Councillor Harper was duly elected as Chairman of the Joint Scrutiny Committee and any further meetings of the committee going forward that would meet to discuss COVID-19.

RECOMMENDATION

The Joint Meeting of the Scrutiny Committees **RESOLVED** to agree to the appointment of Councillor Harper as Chairman at any meetings of the Joint Scrutiny Committee that were held specifically to scrutinise matters concerning COVID-19.

The Chairman welcomed everyone present and explained that the meeting provided an opportunity for all Members of each Scrutiny Committee to come together to scrutinise Peterborough City Councils response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Committee was informed that the agenda and papers for the meeting had been provided to Members with a covering report and links to access the individual Service Highlight reports and the Financial Report which was presented to Cabinet on 11 May 2020.

Members of the public had also been invited to ask questions in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Jamil and Councillor Hemraj. Councillor Amjad Iqbal was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Jamil.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

There were no declarations of interest or whipping declarations.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions received for this meeting.

5. PETERBOROUGH CITY COUNCILS RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The Chief Executive of Peterborough City Council introduced the report which provided details of the Council's response to the current Coronavirus pandemic; the progress made on assessing financial, service and community impact; and the Council's initial approach to recovery. The Chief Executive advised that Highlight reports of the activity of each main area of operation of the Council for COVID-19 was being sent to all Members on a weekly basis, and that the authority relied on Councillors to report back any intelligence where there were issues within their community.

Although the Authority was responding to the pandemic, work had also been underway on the recovery plan for issues such as the reopening the City, schools and the introduction of safer cycling.

The Chief Executive also relayed her thanks to all Councillors, voluntary organisations and faith groups for the amazing and practical help provided during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Members thanked the Chief Executive and her team for all the work that they had undertaken locally during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- The Chief Executive advised that guidance with relation to accommodation arrangements for rough sleepers had been received within a very short timescale and the LA responded as quickly as they could to the accommodation need. Although it was hoped that the LA would never have to go through such a crisis in the future, some lessons had been learnt and a reflection session would be held.
- Assurances were sought that Peterborough would be sufficiently included within the safer cycling plans as outlined by the Secretary of State for Transport? Members were advised that the Secretary of State for Transport's plan was on the radar and this would be reported on later in the meeting.
- Peterborough City Council were part of a network in the East of England and one of the areas of focus being explored currently had been progress in relation to the forthcoming Track and Trace programme, which Peterborough was the regional lead on. The information had been shared generously amongst all authorities and lessons were being learnt from what had worked well and not so well.

Adult Social Care and Commissioning

The Service Director: Adults and Safeguarding, and the Service Director Commissioning, provided an introduction to the service report which covered adult social care, including care homes and community support and how the services were continuing to be provided.

Members thanked the officers for the work that had been undertaken in the community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- Clarification was sought over what strategy the Local Authority (LA) had in relation to the allocation of increased funding for the care sector and if there had been any autonomy for care homes on how the money could be spent? The Service Director Commissioning advised that the 10% uplift in care funding was distributed to all LA care providers and that they could allocate the money according to local care needs. There had been a further £6m funding received from the Government, which was to be allocated between contracted and non-contracted care providers.
- There had been a strong response to provide PPE where required. The Community Hub would issue emergency supplies if any social care providers were experiencing difficulties.

- Members commented that there had only been 12 deaths in care homes and that the staff had worked extremely hard to keep the elderly safe. Members also complimented Peterborough City Council officers for supporting care providers with the PPE they needed.
- Members were concerned at how care home providers were coping with the additional workload, given the increase of people moving into care? Members were advised that 248 people had returned to their homes from hospital. The department had been in contact with family carers and there had been a mixed response of how people were coping. The main issue for paid carers was with PPE provision, obtaining tests and waiting for results alongside caring for their own families. The LA had made sure that where carers needed support this was provided. The biggest challenge experienced had been in residential homes.

Children's Services

The Service Director, Children and Safeguarding, introduced the report and provided the following information update:

- It was anticipated that the impact for Children's Services would increase when schools reopened, due to an increase in safeguarding referrals from schools.
- There had been huge pressure on NHS services to empty wards and it was thought that there could be an impact for Children suffering conditions such as a childhood disease or mental health. Despite the concern, the NHS had provided amazing support to children in need. In addition, face to face visits were only conducted for those children who were at most risk.
- Schools had also provided an excellent service to children at risk by contacting them regularly.
- Some family needs were better served using a virtual platform rather than a drop in engagement with them.
- There had also been an increase in young people engaging virtually with youth services. The virtual engagement arrangement was thought to be an area which the service would want to take forward in the 'New Normal'.

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- Members commented that virtual engagement should be an initiative that Safeguarding services should take forward and develop in the 'New Normal'.
- The Service Director, Children and Safeguarding advised that Care Leavers were being supported either by face to face or virtual contact in order to ascertain how they were feeling during the COVID-19 lockdown period. Practical support had been provided with shopping and food parcels. In addition, Care Leavers had been provided with laptops and if no access to the internet had been available they were provided with a Dongle for internet connection.
- Clarification was sought as to what recruitment arrangements had been put in place to increase the number of Social Workers to deal with a potential rise in safeguarding issues. Members were advised that there had been a rise in the recruitment of permanent Social Workers. In addition, some agency staff had been made permanent. Members were also informed that if the Authority required an increase in Social Workers, due to a rise in demand, they would need to recruit from agencies or other authorities. There may be a need to explore other solutions such as the use of General Practitioners specialising in children's health, however, the DfE would need to approve this approach.

Education

The Service Director, Education, introduced the report and provided the following updated information:

- It was 'Thank a Teacher Day' and many staff were being recognised for all their hard work to provide educational support to children during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially to those vulnerable students.
- The Return to School Plan was in its recovery phase.
- Peterborough LEA and the Academy Trusts had maintained a strong collaborative relationship on methods to deliver education.
- It was anticipated that schools would reopen in early June 2020 starting with Early Years followed by Secondary and Special Schools. The reopening of schools was subject however, to the scientific evidence.

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- Members commented that some children were undertaking studies in important years and asked whether those that had experienced learning difficulties would need to repeat an academic year? The Service Director, Education advised Members that there had been no intention to repeat educational years for children experiencing learning difficulties, instead the education department would find ways for children to catch up. Education provision was being provided at home and laptops provided to support vulnerable children.
- Members complimented the Service Director, Education for providing Head Teachers with the option on when to open Peterborough schools and asked how many schools had planned to open once the Government announcements were made? Members were advised that the data in relation to which schools were due to reopen was being collated. No schools had reported that they would not open in June. The Education department had delivered PPE to schools to ensure that all the safety measures were in place. Children would only require PPE, where children had displayed symptoms and were waiting for a parent to collect them.
- The Service Director, Education advised that guidance was being sought from organisations such as BMA and SAGE to ensure the right approach was undertaken by the Local Authority for children and staff to return to school. It was anticipated that schools would reopen from 1 June 2020, however, it would not be enforced. Detailed guidance was expected from 28 May 2020 and following review of the information, the Authority would liaise with school leaders accordingly. Parents would be given a choice whether to send their child to school or not and there would also be no sanction imposed on a parent if they decided to keep their child away from school during the COVID-19 pandemic period.
- Co-opted Members complimented the Executive Director, Education in relation to the robust, clear and reliable guidance received by the LA in relation to schools opening and the COVID-19 pandemic. The quality and frequency of the advice and guidance to Head Teachers over the COVID-19 pandemic had been very good. School leaders had also appreciated the guidance received on how to provide virtual lessons and other learning platforms especially for key worker children and vulnerable children.
- Clarification was sought over whether there would be extra funding to provide schools with extra cleaning equipment during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Members were advised that there had been an Exceptional Circumstances Services Grant made available to schools, and the LA had provided advice on where to source the right cleaning materials. In addition, the Authority had requested further funding from the DfE.

- The infection risk in schools was very low. Guidance had been received that PPE should not be used where it was not necessary. There may however be a need for special schools to use PPE as some children had needs which required close contact.
- The Executive Director, Education advised Members that he had been attending regular meetings with the DfE and had liaised closely with the Academy Trusts and the Regional Schools Commissioner over the safe reopening of schools.
- Clarification was sought as to how the Authority would ensure that safe school transport would be provided for children living in rural areas during the COVID-19 pandemic period once schools reopened? Members were advised that there had been some requirement for secondary school Year 10 pupils to attend face to face support, as well as children of key workers and social distancing rules were being undertaken by bus drivers. This would continue when more children started returning to school. The LA would monitor the arrangements and adjust procedures appropriately during the COVID-10 pandemic period.
- LA schools had been given flexibility on how they could operate, which would be carried out in line with the guidance provided. Academy Trusts would operate within their own guidelines.
- Members sought reassurance that no child would go hungry as a result of the delay in the dispatch of the free school lunch voucher scheme and asked whether the issue had been resolved? Members were advised that there had been some initial technical issues experienced in the issuing of school lunch vouchers, in addition, there had been limited supermarkets operating the scheme. The LA had asked schools to explore other routes with regard to voucher distribution to parents. Advice had also been sought from the DfE. The system had since improved and schools were now able to escalate any issues directly to the LA.
- The LA and Academy Trusts had made appropriate support available to teachers, such as counselling through the Employee Assistance Programme. Schools were also operating rotas to ensure that teachers were receiving the appropriate rest periods during such a challenging time.
- Parents were required to make a declaration in relation to home schooling their child, however there had been no significant increase in requests during the COVID 19 period
- Schools had been given very clear guidance in relation to safety procedures and cleaning procedures should there be a suspected case of COVID-19 found in a school. A school would close should there be a need to.
- Peterborough had a pupil referral unit, the Richard Barns Academy that catered for alternative provision for those excluded pupils and there had been no financial issues. The financial difficulties outlined in the report referred to alternative provision in Cambridgeshire.
- Members commented that the current scientific evidence had suggested it was unlikely for a serious COVID-19 outbreak in a primary school. However, there would be no way of knowing whether a child was asymptomatic and whether this could be traced to avoid an outbreak in communities. Given the scientific evidence Members questioned how safe it would be for schools to reopen fully by the next full term. Members were advised that a track and trace system had been announced by the Government and it was expected that asymptomatic advice would be included in this. The LA would review the guidance thoroughly and liaise with school leaders to ensure the safety of children, teachers and communities.

ACTIONS AGREED

The Joint Meeting of the Scrutiny Committees requested that the Service Director, Education provide Members with data in relation to the trend in home schooling children requests received from parents.

Coordination and Response Hub for Shielded and Vulnerable people

The Service Director for Communities and Partnerships, introduced the report and provided the following updated information:

- The Hub covered Peterborough and Cambridgeshire and supported the most vulnerable people.
- There were around 5250 shielded people in Peterborough and the Authority were contacting these people to encourage them to register for the Hub support. The support shielded people were being offered ranged from shopping, food parcels, collection of medicines and household chores. So far 3000 had registered in Peterborough.
- Peterborough had been working with Cambridgeshire District and City Council partners to support local volunteer hub groups. Volunteers were stepping forward to support shielded people without being asked to.
- The Faith sector and Social Landlord partners had also been exemplary in helping those people the Authority had found challenging to reach.

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- The Service Director for Communities and Partnerships confirmed that the Authority was receiving triangulated data from a wide range of sources. The data was extensive and included those that needed to be shielded or not. The Authority had been keen to ensure that those people who needed to shield, knew how to contact the Authority and Members were encouraged to continue to advertise this support information on social media.
- Members commented that where they were able; they had referred people who required support to the Hub and complimented the Community Hub for all the incredible work they had undertaken to support those in need.
- Members asked how successful the operation of the Hub service had been since the update provided in the 26 April report. Members were informed that although there had been several weeks since the report was produced, there had been 4000 incoming calls and 7000 outbound calls made a week through the Hub. The feedback received had been positive and people were amazed by the range and type of support on offer to those who were shielding. The service aimed to ensure that all the positive features were sustained through partnership working, and that there would be an update report to highlight the tangible outcomes at a future Scrutiny meeting.

Communities and Partnerships

The Service Director for Communities and Partnerships, introduced the report and provided the following updated information:

- Services were continuing and being adapted where necessary.
- CCTV services continued to operate 24/7
- Adult skills had adapted and provided online opportunities to 600 learners and 90% had engaged.
- A new learning and social interaction service had been developed through the City College, Cambridgeshire Libraries and Skills to offer other opportunities to those who were shielded.

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- Members asked whether services from the Enforcement team were sufficiently resourced to tackle issues such as bonfires, fly tipping, people breaking into play areas and problems with drugs. The Service Director for Communities and Partnerships advised that there had been several issues such as noise pollution and anti-social behaviour. There had however, been a good collaboration with services such as the police to tackle these issues and working collaboratively had been of great value.
- The Assistant Director Community Safety advised that there had been a rise in issues such as anti-social behaviour and fly tipping and the Enforcement team were working towards putting extra resources in place. The re-opening of the household recycling centre, the City and its car parks was also being considered.
- Several options were being explored to provide support to the community centres and Members would be advised of the action being taken in due course.
- Members referred to the rubbish that had been left behind from a recent traveller encampment which had since been dispersed and asked what prosecution action would be taken. Members were informed that as with all cases this issue was being investigated. The team were awaiting the conclusion of the investigation in order to prosecute. However, it was not always possible to pin the evidence on any particular individual. The team had worked hard to clear the site in question and put measures in place to stop the issue happening again.
- Members asked how the Citizens Advice (CA) service was coping during the COVID-19 crises especially as a result of the recent funding cuts. Members were informed that the CA were coping well with the new arrangements despite an increase in calls and had adapted to a new operating model introduced prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Public Health.

The Director for Public Health, introduced the report and provided the following updated information:

- There were currently 371 COVID-19 cases confirmed in Peterborough and this was below the national average. The low number of cases were as a result of communities following the rules.
- Public Health specialists had been advising across many organisations and groups on the response to COVID-19 and analysing trends.
- The Public Health Service had also been providing support in relation to access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- The team was liaising with the Director of Customer Services and the Regional Public Health team on contact tracing and management of local outbreaks.

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- The Director for Public Health advised Members that the eligibility for PPE was defined by the national PPE plan and national guidance. The department also monitored what equipment was being ordered by organisations such as Care Homes and Funeral Directors to ensure that the correct equipment and quantities were being provided.
- It had been recognised that there was a concern in relation to the health of people's teeth during the COVID-19 lockdown period and the temporary closure of dental practices. Whilst some dental practices had closed, some dental staff had been redeployed to help with duties such as swab testing for COVID-19.
- Members noted that the Government had been exploring various ways of testing for COVID-19 and asked what the action plan was to implement the new option from Roche to test for

antibodies? Members were advised that there was a COVID-19 testing cell locally operated by the NHS. There were also different types of tests available as well as other testing facilities nationally. The turnaround time for ordering of tests and receiving results was also reasonably good and was being closely monitored. Although there had been limited information known by the LA about Roche tests, there had been rapid progress made in other antibody tests.

- Some Personal Protection Equipment could be reused and there was national guidance in place for hospitals to follow.
- There had been a national announcement to highlight COVID-19 infection hotspot areas using a track and trace method. Peterborough had been identified to undertake a testing role. The system was however still in the early stages of development.
- Advice on sharing smoking equipment had been provided as the risk of infection was high, and if someone was to touch cigarette remains there would be a risk of the COVID-19 infection being transmitted through saliva.
- Members asked what the trends had shown for Covid-19 deaths in Peterborough. Members were advised that as testing increased the trends would become more apparent and would need to be monitored closely. One trend had shown that there had been a peak in April 2020, but this was reducing.

AGREED ACTION

The Joint Meeting of the Scrutiny Committees requested that the Director of Public health contact NHS England to establish what the latest recovery plan was in relation to the reopening of dental surgeries and provide this information to Members.

Place and Economy

The Executive Director Place & Economy, introduced the report and provided the following updated information:

- The Household Recycling Centre recently reopened with social distancing and traffic measures introduced. The operation would be closely monitored to manage any issues should they arise.
- Guidance had been recently issued in relation to the management of open spaces and a task force had been set up to a review this including how retailers could reopen on 15 June 2020.
- The LA had been liaising the Combined Authority over the reallocation of road space for cycling and pedestrian links, which had been recently announced by the Government. Whilst the Combined Authority awaited the amount of funding allocation, it had been intended to start work quickly on schemes across Peterborough. Sustrans had been tasked to look at maintenance along the green wheel and identify where cycle and pedestrian markings could be placed or improved. Other measures being explored were cycle training, maintenance and parking, temporary school and street closures as well as options for remodelling Crescent Road Bridge to encourage a modal shift.

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- Members commented about the recent Government funding announced in relation to pedestrian and cycle route improvements and felt that the Combined Authority should also explore the reallocation of highways funding to implement the initiative. Members also sought assurances that the Combined Authority would allocate appropriate funding to ensure

Peterborough received what was needed for its improvement schemes. Members were informed that the Combined Authority was keen to support schemes across both Cambridge and Peterborough.

- The garden waste service had been adjusted to monthly collections to accommodate resources required for the black bin collections. However, discussions were being held to reinstate the normal collection cycle and this would be monitored closely.
- Members asked whether the Authority had applied for the New Towns Fund (NTF), especially in relation to COVID-19. Members were advised that the NTF was being explored to support delivery of the Authority's aspirations for the City Centre which included improved pedestrian links. One example included implementing improved pedestrian and cycle links between the Station Quarter and embankment where the new university site was proposed. Guidance on what the Government's expectations were in relation to city improvement schemes, would include advice on COVID-19. It was anticipated that the Authority's transformation plan would include support for businesses due to re-open within the City Centre.
- The Authority would work with bus operators and the Combined Authority to provide safe travel and enable appropriate social distancing for those who had no alternative but to use public transport. Support had also been provided to employment agencies to ensure safer journeys for those continuing to work and had no alternative mode of transport during the pandemic.
- Members commented that there were several streetlights that continued to burn during the day. Members were informed that this had been due to a base station fault. The issue had been resolved and the LA was liaising with the contractors to seek compensation following the fault.
- Members asked whether plans to reopen the City Centre would include a dedicated shopping hour for the shielded group in order to maintain the social distancing procedures implemented by supermarkets during the COVID-19 pandemic. Members were advised that the social distancing measures currently in place for those shielding would be included in discussions to re-open the city. It was the Authority's aim to encourage a safer return for everyone.
- Members asked whether there was any safety guidance available for citizens who wished to resume litter picking duties in the community. Members were informed that there was no specific guidance. Members were advised that there was no specific guidance, however, the Director for Public Health would look into it.

AGREED ACTION

The Joint Meeting of the Scrutiny Committees requested that the Director of Public Health provide Members with safety guidance in relation to litter picking for volunteer groups who wished to restart this activity.

Customer and Digital Service

The Director, Customer and Digital Services, introduced the report and provided the following updated information:

- Information Technology Support, Customer Services Centre, Communications and Emergency Planning Services continued to work on the COVID-19 response and recovery work.
- Work was being undertaken on contact tracing.

- Health and safety in Council offices were being risk assessed to ensure compliance in line with Government guidance for the safe return to work.

There were no questions raised on this section of the report.

Business Intelligence, Commercial, Strategic Projects, and Financial Improvement Programme

The Director of Business Improvement and Development introduced the report however no questions were raised.

Resources

The Acting Corporate Director Resources, introduced the report and provided the following updated information:

- Monthly financial returns had been submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to highlight the recent LA funding pressures. Funding Pressures reported were in the region of £20.7m, however £11m had been received from (MHCLG).
- There had been 2358 rural and small grant applications to the business community and £28m worth of support had been provided to businesses within the Peterborough area.
- In addition, 1274 businesses had received national nondomestic rate support amounting to £65.5m in order to keep operating until the nation moved out of lockdown.
- Registration and Bereavement services continued to operate at full capacity.

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- Members sought assurance that the Central Government funding of £10.9m had been distributed across all work streams within the Council and whether the funding received had been sufficient? Clarification was also sought as to how much recovery funding had been applied for from MHCLG? Members were informed that the £20.7m returns submitted to the MHCLG had included recovery funding, however the figure could change depending on how the COVID-19 pandemic situation changed. The funding is allocated to the overall total – and so is still £10m below what the Council has submitted as being pressures.
- Members commented that the Authority seemed to be at a financial deficit and that many Chief Finance Officers were close to issuing a section 114 notice, which would close them down and asked what representations were being made on this issue? Members were advised that meetings were being held with Chief Officers and Directors of Finance along with the LGA to negotiate with HMCLG on the funding position. The monthly returns had provided the opportunity for the HMCLG to catch up with the financial position being experienced by Local Authorities nationally, such as NDR uncollected tax. It was hoped that the regular HMCLG return would set a new criteria for how future funding would be based.
- Fortnightly meetings were being held with HMCLG, various Treasurers' Societies and London Borough Treasurers and it was anticipated that funding estimates would change depending on how long the Lockdown continued. However, the figures were being assessed and would be presented to the Treasurer in order to obtain extra funding.

Governance

The Director of Law and Governance, introduced the report and provided the following updated information:

- New powers had been introduced under the COVID-19 act to temporarily remove the legal requirement for Local Authorities to hold public meetings in person. This included the removal of the requirement to hold an Annual General Meeting and undertake a Mayor Making meeting. It was agreed with Group Leaders, that meetings would only be held if the business was of an urgent or time critical nature.
- Following the test of several virtual technology platforms, the Authority decided on the use of Zoom and a protocol had been developed. There had been several meetings held to date, such as the Planning and Environmental Protection Committee and Cabinet, which were being livestreamed through the Authority's YouTube channel.
- Extra meetings were being arranged to discuss COVID-19 related business as guided by the Centre of Public Scrutiny. These meetings would provide the opportunity for Members to discuss Peterborough's response to the pandemic. The guidance stated that only life and limb business issues for local people and communities, should be presented to Scrutiny meetings.
- Local Governance Association guidance was sent to all Members to advise on how to operate virtual meetings in relation to COVID-19 business and supplementary guidance which stated that meetings should last no longer than two hours.

Questions and observations were made around the following areas:

- Members raised concerns about the postponement of Full Council meetings and asked why there was an issue, given that Cambridgeshire County Council had continued with their Annual General Meeting and other meeting cycles virtually. The Director of Law and Governance explained that Cambridgeshire County Council operated a different decision making model to Peterborough and that it was possible for Peterborough to make decisions without the need to hold a Committee meeting, whereas the Cambridgeshire model had not.
- Members commented that they were being prevented from scrutinising decisions and asked when call-in meetings were likely to take place. Members were advised that the first round of Scrutiny meetings were not due to take place until July 2020. Currently the Authority's priority was to focus on COVID-19 issues and this business had taken precedence. It was however, anticipated that the Health Scrutiny Committee would be the first meeting to take place in July and items discussed would be COVID-19 related.
- Members commented that using the Chromebook or an iPhone to attend virtual meetings had been very limiting and asked whether equipment provision could be reviewed? Members were advised that IT equipment issues for virtual meetings would be reviewed
- Members commented that the meeting had been useful however very long. Members added that it would be appreciated if the various scrutiny meetings could meet on a virtual basis if possible. Members were informed that all comments would be taken on board and that the team would review what items of business were critical and advise accordingly.
- Members congratulated the Democratic Services team for their hard work in setting up virtual meetings to enable all Councillors to discuss the COVID-19 response and the support being provided to communities.

AGREED ACTIONS

The Joint Meeting of the Scrutiny Committees requested that the Director of Law and Governance review equipment arrangements for those Members where it was notable that they were experiencing technical difficulties during virtual meetings, and particularly where there had been no alternative equipment option available to them.

At this point Councillors Barkham, Dowson and Goodwin, had left the meeting. Co-opted Member Parish Councillor Susie Lucas had also left the meeting.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the report and made the following recommendations:

- I. The Committee recommended that full council meetings (virtual) should resume from July 2020 for urgent or time critical motions as agreed by Group Leaders; and
- II. That the Director of Public Health would explore the possibility of Peterborough joining the Department of Health's pilot study of mass testing for COVID 19.

The Chairman closed the meeting and thanked officers for all their hard work in supporting residents and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

CHAIRMAN

The meeting began at 4:30PM and ended at 7:38PM