

Regeneration and Sustainable Development Scrutiny Committee

(Via Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

17 July 2020

Chairperson: Councillor S.K.Hunt

Vice Chairperson: Councillor R.L.Taylor

Councillors: D.Cawsey, C.J.Jones, H.N.James, S.M.Penry, S.Pursey, S.Rahaman, N.T.Hunt, S.Bamsey and J.Evans

Officers In Attendance N.Pearce, C.Morris, S.Brennan, S.Curran, C.Davies, S.Burgess, C.Jones, E. Wellington, T.Davies, N.Thomas and A.Manchipp

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors L.Jones

The Committee held a minute's silence in respect for the recent passing of Councillor Steffan Ap Dafydd.

1. **Recovery Strategy**

Members were presented with a draft strategy on stabilisation, the period between response and recovery, following the COVID 19 outbreak. The strategy set out a general framework that would support a consistent and co-ordinated approach as the Council moved towards recovery. It was noted that the draft strategy was being presented to all Scrutiny Committees for comments before presentation to Cabinet on 30th July 2020 for approval.

Officers gave a brief overview of the content of the strategy, explaining that it was split into three sections which consisted of looking back at what the Council did during the response phase of the crisis, looking forward as the UK moved out of the response phase and a road map of actions.

When looking back at what the Council did during the response phase, it was highlighted that a number of key actions were

undertaken including setting up a seven day a week communication service so that guidance from UK Government, Welsh Government and Public Health Wales could be sent out as and when it was available. It was added that the Council closed down services to assist in reducing the spread of the virus and changed the way some critical services operated in order to operate safely, for example the refuse service. Officers mentioned that the first part of the strategy also set out the changes that were made in relation to leadership and governance, including the use of the Urgency Action provision set out in the Constitution, to ensure that key decisions were still being taken during the response phase.

The second part of the strategy was explained to Members, which consisted of looking forward as the UK moved out of response phase into a stabilisation period which is the stage before moving into the recovery phase. It was explained that there were three areas identified as a focus as the Council moved forward:

1. The Test, Trace and Protect Programme
2. Standing up of Council services and functions
3. Understand and respond to the effect and impact that the virus has had on citizens, organisations and businesses across Neath Port Talbot

It was added that the second part also set out the changes required to be made in terms of leadership and governance, as well as some of the risks and issues identified that will need to be managed as the Council goes through the implementation of the strategy.

The third part of the strategy was presented as a road map of actions which was framed on the basis of a traffic light system, which set out how to move from a position of total lockdown, through the traffic light system, to a position where services are back up and running.

Members looked forward to being kept updated with the monitoring of the strategy in future sessions.

2. Planning and Public Protection - Current Service Delivery & Recovery Planning

Members were provided with an overview of the current service position in Planning and how service delivery was proceeding as the

Council moved towards the recovery phase from the coronavirus emergency.

Members were informed that;

- The planning process has continued operating and the Planning Committee had been meeting remotely. Enforcement has been ongoing but only for significant or urgent breaches.
- LDP review process has been delayed but is ongoing
- Building Control has been ongoing
- Environmental Health and Trading Standards has seen a variety of new functions required and there has been a requirement to prioritise functions.

Members noted that planning will be a vital function going forward and staff were thanked for their ongoing dedication and professionalism and their availability to members throughout.

Members asked if officers were confident that the Council has sufficient resources in place to provide appropriate advice and support to business in relation to reopening in line with Covid guidance. Members were informed that while it is a challenge due to ever changing guidance, a multi -agency Regulatory Service and Enforcement Group meets weekly to co-ordinate and that businesses are being actively engaged with in relation to the latest messaging and the most up to date advice that is available.

Members were pleased to note the pro-active approach being taken should there be a second wave in the Autumn.

3. Property and Regeneration - Current Service Delivery & Recovery Planning

Members were provided with an overview of the current service position in Property and Regeneration and how service delivery was proceeding as the Council moved towards the recovery phase from the coronavirus emergency.

Members were informed that:

- Low levels of sickness had been seen across the service as a result of staff working from home
- There had been some issues with home working due to high end kit and software
- Schools progressing onsite

- Key sites progressing (i.e. Plaza, Neath town centre, Metal Box.)
- Regeneration and Economic Development Team instrumental in supporting businesses administering 6,000 grants to a value of £31m.
- Increased demand to Workways
- Rapid guidance changes to disseminate.
- Additional duties for cleaning staff

Members asked for an update in relation to the Field Hospital at Llandarcy. The hospital had been paid for by Welsh Government and the revenue costs will be picked up by the Health Board.

Members asked if the public were adhering to signage and one way systems in Neath town centre and were pleased to note that the system is being monitored.

The committee noted that a Visitor Marketing Strategy would be implemented to encourage visitors to the Borough.

4. **Partnerships and Community Cohesion**

Members were provided with an overview of the current service position in Community Safety and how service delivery was proceeding as the Council moved towards the recovery phase from the coronavirus emergency.

They asked for an update in relation to non-fatal drug poisoning reports and were pleased to note that robust mechanisms are now in place via a case review co-ordinator.

Members discussed incidents of anti-social behaviour throughout lockdown and noted that even minor incidents caused great levels of distress but there was more acceptance now. Members agreed that engagement needs to be reconsidered in light of Covid restrictions.

Members were pleased to hear about the plans to increase capacity in the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDFA) team.

Members agreed it was important to share messages via social media re upcoming community safety campaigns. The committee noted the strong partnership support and the ongoing working relationship with members and looked forward to building on this going forward.

For future sessions, the Community Safety and Public Protection Sub Committee will meet to consider items within its remit.

CHAIRPERSON