

Time commenced – 18:00

Time finished – 20:03

Corporate Services Scrutiny Review Board

23 July 2020

Present: Councillor Naitta(Chair)
Councillors Stanton (Vice Chair), A Pegg, McCristal and Nawaz

In Attendance: Simon Riley – Director of Financial Services
Michael Kay – Head of Environmental Protection, Housing
Standards, Licensing and Emergency Planning
Heather Greenan – Service Director for Policy, Insight, and
Communications
John Massey – Head of Benefits & Exchequer Services

01/20 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies.

02/20 Late items introduced by the Chair

There were no late items.

03/20 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

04/20 Minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

05/20 Supporting Licence Holders During COVID-19

The Head of Environmental Protection, Housing Standards, Licensing and Emergency Planning presented the Board with an update on how the Council had been supporting Licence Holders during the Covid-19 pandemic.

It was noted that the Council had a responsibility for licensing:

- Pubs, Restaurants, Takeaways, Café
 - Alcohol, Regulated Entertainment, Late Night Refreshment & Street Café / Pavement
- Animal Health
 - Breeding, Boarding, Pet Shops
- Skin Piercing
 - Body Piercing, Tattooing, Acupuncture & Electrolysis
- Hackney Carriage & Private Hire

- Drivers, Vehicles, Operators
- Housing Standards
 - HMO Licencing

The Board noted that during the Covid-19 pandemic the Council had taken the following actions in order to support Licence Holders:

- Business as usual
 - Working with License Holders to help maintain this.
- Legislative changes
 - Keeping License Holders updated on new legislation.
- Guidance
 - Supporting License Holders in meeting guidance from central government.
- Working with partners
 - Working with Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Cars to facilitate the use of protective screens for drivers and passengers.
- Advice & support
 - Public Protection Officers have been passing on information to License Holders. The Council have been in contact with the Police regarding social distancing measures.
- Inspection & Compliance
 - The Council have only needed to carry out limited number of inspections.
- Formal action
 - Has only been required in very limited instances where some businesses have opened too early.

A Councillor questioned whether any provisions had been made to allow Licence Holders to expand their outdoor options. The Head of Environmental Protection, Housing Standards, Licensing and Emergency Planning informed the Board that the Council was considering applications for Temporary Event Notices on an individual basis. It was noted that License holders still needed to follow current Licensing Laws. It was reported that new legislation from central government would provide licensees who had permission to sell alcohol on site with an off licence up until September 2021.

A councillor questioned whether it was legal for Private Hire Taxis to use protective screens. The Board noted that protective screens were legal, and it was a driver's choice as to whether or not they used protective screens. It was noted that the Council supported the use of protective screens as a temporary measure.

Resolved to note the information provided within the presentation.

06/20 Revenue and Benefits

The Head of Benefits & Exchequer Services presented the Board with an update on what support the Council was providing to individuals and businesses who could not access public funds/business grants offered by central Government during the Covid-19 pandemic.

It was noted that there were 111,159 domestic dwellings in Derby and that £126.5m had been billed in Council Tax in 20/21. It was reported that at the end of June 2020 the Council had received nearly £33m in current year Council Tax payments. It was noted that there were 8,887 commercial assessments in Derby and that £56.7m had been billed in Business Rates in 20/21.

It was reported that based upon the Council's 19/20 outturn report & statement of accounts, Council Tax and Business Rates had accounted for; 61% of the Council's total funding in 19/20.

The Board noted that the Council had supported residents in fulfilling their Council Tax obligations through:

- Reduced 20/21 Council Tax accounts by nearly £30m through the award of reliefs and discounts – including around £13m in Council Tax Support
- Suspended all recovery action until 30 June 2020 – current year and arrears
- Allowed tax payers to defer their first 20/21 instalments from April to June – 2,159 households took us up on that offer
- Reduced 20/21 Council Tax accounts by nearly £30m through the award of reliefs and discounts – including around £13m in Council Tax Support
- Suspended all recovery action until 30 June 2020 – current year and arrears
- Allowed tax payers to defer their first 20/21 instalments from April to June – 2,159 households took us up on that offer

The Board noted that the Council was currently using the following measures to support residents in fulfilling their Council Tax obligations:

- Promoting Council Tax Support – raising the profile on DCC website, flyers with reminders, social media comms, potential member training
- Awarding a further £150 for all working age households in receipt of Council Tax Support
- Using our intelligence to highlight those who are vulnerable or who can't pay and taking appropriate action
- Promoting self-service
- Reviewing our recovery escalation process to ensure its fit for purpose

It was reported that the Council had helped to develop a new Money Advice Partnership for Derby; made up of eight organisations including the Council and Chaired by Community Action Derby. It was noted that Cabinet had agreed £360k in funding for this Partnership over the next three years.

The Board noted that the Council had supported businesses in fulfilling their Business Rates obligations through:

- Reduced 20/21 Business Rates Accounts by over £58m through the award of reliefs and discounts – most we receive funding for
- Suspended all recovery action until 30 June 2020 – current year and arrears

- Allowed rate payers to defer their first 20/21 instalments from April to July – 505 businesses took us up on that offer
- Paid Business Support Grants totalling nearly £42m to over 3,400 businesses

The Board noted that the Council was currently using the following measures to support businesses in fulfilling their Business Rates obligations:

- Continuing to promote the various reliefs available to businesses
- Working with colleagues in D2N2 to maximise support available to businesses
- Reviewing our recovery escalation process to ensure its fit for purpose
- Listening to any reasonable arrangement

A Councillor stated that they had received very positive reports from local businesses on the support that Derby City Council was offering them. A councillor questioned whether any modelling had been conducted on the impact of Covid-19 on the levels of Council Tax and Business Rates that the Council would receive in 20/21. The Head of Benefits & Exchequer Services informed the Board that current modelling predictions showed Council Tax and business Rates receipts would be down by 1-5% on the previous year.

The Board noted that in Derby there were 23,000 Universal Credit claimants at the end of May 2020 and that 15,000 of these were claiming Universal Credit due to unemployment. A councillor questioned how many business support applications had been rejected by the Council. The Head of Benefits & Exchequer Services informed the Board that 753 had been rejected.

A councillor asked if councillors could be provided with training on supporting residents with Council Tax. The Head of Benefits & Exchequer Services stated that he would look into organising this training.

A councillor stated that one of their constituents was having trouble in paying Business Rates on time. The Head of Benefits & Exchequer Services informed the Board that Benefits & Exchequer Services worked with the Welfare Reform Team to help business owners to recognise Business Rates as a priority debt. The Head of Benefits & Exchequer Services stated that the Council only set repayment arrangements that were manageable for business owners.

Resolved to note the information provided within the presentation.

07/20 Strategic Lead on all Council Services

The Service Director for Policy, Insight, and Communications presented the Board with an update on the Council's strategic recovery and response to Covid-19.

It was noted that the Council recognised that the Covid-19 pandemic was far from over and that the Council was still responding to the pandemic by:

- Ensuring vulnerable people get the health and care that they need
- Supporting our communities

- Helping business and workforces to stay resilient
- Maintaining essential services
- Keeping people informed

It was reported that there had been a huge impact upon the community in Derby as a result of Covid-19, including:

- Over 1,300 confirmed cases, with 300+ lives lost
- 2,500 calls for help to the Community Hub
- Strengthened relationship with VCS
- Increased concerns about mental and physical health conditions
- Long term housing needs
- Some vulnerable children are not in school
- Rise in contacts for domestic violence / abuse
- Increasing numbers of children's referrals

It was noted that Covid-19 had also had a huge impact upon the economy in Derby, including:

- Big hit on retail and hospitality in city centre
- Downturn in aerospace and manufacturing sectors
- 35% workforce furloughed
- Large increase in Universal Credit claims
- Expected rise in unemployment rate
- Culture and leisure partners struggling
- Strong response from partners and businesses

It was noted that Covid-19 had also had the following impact on Derby City Council:

- Backlogs in services as we re-open
- Significant financial impact
- Delays to capital schemes
- Increasing demand for services
- Over 170 staff redeployed to priority areas
- Virtual council meetings
- Agile and remote working
- New ways of working
- Team Derby collaboration
- Improved public perception

A Councillor questioned whether the Council had conducted an enquiry or a similar exercise into how the Council had responded to the pandemic. It was noted that this was currently being conducted through the Local Resilience Forum.

A Councillor questioned whether the Council's hotel provision for homeless people had now ended. The Board noted that this had now ended and that appropriate exit arrangements had been put in place for individuals that the Council had supported through this provision.

A councillor questioned whether the Board could be provided with further information on Covid-19 cases in Derby. The Service Director for Policy, Insight, and Communications agreed that this would be shared with the Board through email.

Resolved to note the information provided within the presentation.

08/20 Covid-19 – Financial Impact

The Director of Financial Services presented the Board with an update on the financial impact of Covid-19 on Derby City Council.

It was noted that the Covid-19 pandemic required Councils to respond quickly to community, business and individual needs both locally and in response to Government guidance. It was reported that Derby City Council's response was agile and cost effective. It was noted that the quantum of need meant that every Council in the country had to spend money ahead of Government funding and that this was done in good faith with initial announcements by the Secretary of State at the time.

It was noted that the Cabinet received a Covid-19 report on 10th June and that this was attached at Appendix 1 of the report for reference. It was reported that this demonstrated the type of interventions that the Council had made with and for the Community. It was noted that not all the Council's support required additional spend, especially due to the amazing response of the community in supporting others during this unprecedented time.

It was reported that the Government had provided two un-ringfenced grants to meet the costs of Covid-19 alongside two ringfenced grants for Infection Control and Track and Trace. It was noted that the first two un-ringfenced grants were insufficient to meet the financial impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic. It was noted that the Government had recently announced another £500 million for local authorities and an income guarantee to fund 75% of income losses from fees and charges after the first 5% loss has been met by Councils.

A Councillor questioned whether additional funds from national government would be made available should Derby need to go into a second lockdown. The Director of Financial Services informed the Board that there were not currently government funds available to support local councils with the consequences of second lockdowns.

Resolved to note the information provided within the report.

09/20 Work Programme for 2020/21 Municipal Year

The Board considered a report setting out the Work Programme for 2020/21 Municipal Year.

Resolved to note the information provided within the report.

MINUTES END