

Meeting	Customer and Corporate Services Scrutiny Management Committee
Date	8 February 2021
Present	Councillors Crawshaw (Chair), Fenton (Vice-Chair), Hunter, Hollyer, Kilbane, Rowley, Musson, Pearson and Mason

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#### **68. Declarations of Interest**

At this point in the meeting, the Chair invited Members to declare any personal or prejudicial interests not already declared in their Standing Register of Interests. None were declared.

#### **69. Minutes**

The minutes of the last meeting of the Committee were approved as a correct record by the Committee for the Chair to sign at a later date post pandemic.

At this point in the meeting, in light of a commitment he had given to report back at this meeting on circumstances which had arisen the last time Members had met at the Calling In meeting on 25 January 2021, the Chair advised Members of an internal investigation which had been undertaken relating to the provision of access codes for remote meetings and of revised internal working practices to better manage those processes.

#### **70. Public Participation**

There had been one registration to speak at the meeting from Paula Bennison, in accordance with the Council's Public Participation Scheme. Further to Minute No 77 below, Ms Bennison spoke about her experiences of the Council's complaints procedure and in particular her concerns regarding the need for better logging and recording of information and improved communication and cooperation across departments and agencies. The Chair took the opportunity to advise Ms Bennison that Ward Councillors could often help to progress

cases of the nature of the one she described relating to tenancy issues.

## 71. **Public Health Update on Covid-19**

The Director of Public Health attended the meeting to give her monthly presentation on the most current public health information available relating to Covid 19, which broadly covered:

- 7 day incidence rates per 100,000, showing how York's figures were decreasing towards the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> wave;
- Positivity rates (Pillar 2 only) at 6.4% now lower than the national/regional average;
- Trends across all age bands;
- Excess deaths since the start of the pandemic;
- Covid patients in York hospital in general, acute and intensive care beds, steadily falling;
- Cases in residential settings/schools, with 6 confirmed cases in care home cases @ 4 February 2021 and @ 31 December 2020, 28 school children had tested positive across primary and secondary schools;
- Rates by ward, with Fulford & Heslington currently being highest;
- MSOA (Medium Super Output Areas) rates in last 7 days, a map detailing outbreaks in York would be emailed to Members of the Committee. The pattern of outbreaks had shifted slightly from more in Bishopthorpe & Askham Richard to acceleration in Woodthorpe & Acomb Park in recent days. Test centres were being mobilised in both those areas;
- Local tracing of cases, where 96% of contact referrals had been actioned since it had started in October 2020;
- New variants with the Kent variant being predominant in York at 81% of new cases;
- Vaccination overview with 99% of York residents aged 80+ having received the first dose.

The Director summarised the ongoing key issues as being the expansion of testing to businesses with more than 50 employees; enhanced contact tracing; compliance with social isolation; the refresh of York's Outbreak Management Plan and any future roadmap out of national lockdown.

Members questioned the Director on a range of issues from the need to improve communication about discarded face masks, and testing Council employees to younger age band figures, as well as the impact on other public health issues arising from a continued focus on Covid 19, on which the Director advised that there would be a presentation to a future appropriate meeting.

Resolved: That the presentation be noted and the Director be thanked for all her continuing efforts and those of her team and consideration be given to improving communication across the city relating to discarded face masks.

Reason: To be kept informed of key public health developments affecting the Council and the city during the Covid 19 pandemic.

## **72. Council Update**

The Chief Operating Officer attended the meeting to give a verbal update on continuing impact of the pandemic on schools; new business grants; hospital pressure, the demand on adult social care services, as well as the multi effects of budget preparations and a flooding crisis. He referred to the statutory services which the Council continued to deliver, the support still being offered in communities and the continuing unerring commitment of staff at this time.

Looking to the future, he indicated that new unitaries, under devolution, were not likely to be created until 2023. More locally in York, in May 2021 the Police & Crime Commissioner elections were due to be held and plans to return to the office in the new 'normal' were being looked at, post lockdown.

Members then questioned the Chief Operating Officer variously, covering the impact on staff wellbeing of a potential 'recruitment freeze' and the progress of the local plan.

Resolved: That the update be noted and the Chief Operating Officer be thanked for his attendance at the meeting.

Reason: To be kept informed of any service related issues during the pandemic and emergence from it.

*(Councillor Rowley BEM left the meeting at the end of this item, due to needing to attend a Parish Council meeting)*

### **73. Sickness Absence**

Members considered a report giving an update on sickness levels with a particular focus on Covid 19 and how staff both affected and unaffected by the virus were being supported by the Council. Those measures included symptom free testing, vaccinations for Health & Social Care staff and health & wellbeing surveys.

The Chair invited the Corporate Director of Economy & Place to outline how the pilot in the highways and waste teams had helped to manage sickness absence in those key areas.

Members then posed a number of questions relating to prioritising staff for vaccinations, measuring how fit staff with Covid actually were to work and flexible working hours for staff with carer responsibilities.

Resolved: That the report and current position be noted.

Reason: To be kept informed of staff wellbeing and sickness levels during the pandemic and allow appropriate scrutiny of support measures.

### **74. Schools Update**

Members received an update from both the Assistant Director of Education & Skills and the Chair of York Schools & Academies Board on the current situation being faced by schools during the 3<sup>rd</sup> lockdown. Whilst there had been greater anxiety across schools during this lockdown, generally schools were operating as close to normal as currently possible, with attendance of those legally allowed to attend remaining above the national average for all groups. In recent times there had been greater equitability of access to on-line tools.

Following their updates they responded to a range of questions relating to the challenges around data, the supply of dongles,

actual attendance figures, potential school opening hours post Covid 19 and a potential recovery curriculum being addressed.

Resolved: That the update be received and the Assistant Director and Chair of York Schools & Academies Board be thanked for their attendance and contributions.

Reason: To be kept informed of any issues affecting schools during the pandemic.

#### **75. Annual Complaints Report March 2019 to April 2020**

Members considered a report analysing complaints received for the year March 2019 to April 2020, details being set out in Annex 1 to the report. It covered complaints relating to adults and children's social care, those received under the Corporate Complaints & Feedback procedures and Ombudsman cases. It had previously been considered by Audit & Governance Committee and was before this Committee for public scrutiny.

At the Chair's invitation, Officers then responded to a variety of questions regarding raising awareness of complaints procedures within service areas, the nature of complaints and any emerging patterns and how the Council could make improvements to minimise referrals to the Ombudsman.

Resolved: That the report and Annual Complaints Report be noted.

Reason: To provide an opportunity for public scrutiny on the Annual Complaints Report.

#### **76. Work Plan 2019/20**

Members considered and received an update on the corporate scrutiny work plan covering the next meeting of this Committee and the meetings of other Scrutiny Committees in the coming month.

Resolved: That the work plan be noted and agreed.

Reason: To keep the Committee informed and consulted upon forthcoming business for scrutiny meetings.

## **77. Corporate Complaints and Feedback Toolkit**

Members considered a report setting out proposals for a revised and revised Corporate Complaints & Feedback policy & procedures toolkit, as part of a review of a review of the governance and handling of complaints and feedback. To assist with understanding of its application and timelines for introducing, Members were given a short presentation on the details, during which Officers responded to various questions regarding the changes and improvements within the revised toolkit.

**Resolved:** That the report and presentation be noted and Members raise any further questions they may have on the toolkit directly with the Monitoring Officer.

**Reason:** To provide an opportunity for scrutiny of the toolkit.

## **78. Urgent Business - Scrutiny Research Support Budget**

Members considered a report relating to the amount to be recommended to Budget Council in relation to the scrutiny external research support budget, which the Chair had agreed to accept on to the agenda as urgent business in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Act 1972. In light of the current pandemic and financial position facing the Council, the Chair moved and Vice Chair seconded with it being unanimously agreed that the current level of funding be maintained at £5k.

**Resolved:** That Full Council be asked to consider retaining the current level of funding at £5k for external research support as part of the budget setting process for 2021/22.

**Reason:** To meet the Committee's constitutional rights to be consulted on the budget it requires for external scrutiny research support.

Councillor J Crawshaw, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.30 pm and finished at 8.32 pm].