

Minutes



To: All Members of the Special Cabinet Panel, Chief Executive, Chief Officers, All officers named for 'actions'

From: Legal, Democratic & Statutory Services
Ask for: Stephanie Tarrant / Michelle Diprose
Ext: 25566

SPECIAL CABINET PANEL - FRIDAY, 17 APRIL 2020

ATTENDANCE

MEMBERS OF THE SPECIAL CABINET PANEL

For this meeting the membership was:-

J Billing, A P Brewster, R C Deering, S B A F H Giles-Medhurst, T C Heritage (Chairman), F R G Hill, T R Hutchings, S K Jarvis, R M Roberts, R Sangster, S J Taylor, P M Zukowskyj

OTHER MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Upon consideration of the agenda for the Special Cabinet Panel meeting on Friday, 17 April 2020 as circulated, copy annexed, conclusions were reached and are recorded below:

PART I ('OPEN') BUSINESS

1. SPECIAL CABINET PANEL TERMS OF REFERENCE

[Officer Contact: Elaine Shell, Democratic Services Manager
Tel: 01992 555565]

- 1.1 The Panel received a report which provided the terms of reference of the Special Cabinet Panel agreed by Group Leaders on 20 March 2020.
- 1.2 The Panel heard that due to the developing Covid-19 pandemic and associated government instruction around local authority meetings had resulted in the County Council having to review its arrangements to ensure the continuing ability of the Executive to make decisions. Group Leaders have agreed that the County Council's existing Cabinet Panels should be suspended with immediate effect and that this Special Cabinet Panel be established in their place, this is to be effective for a period of at least 2 – 3 months or as appropriate.
- 1.3 The Panel noted and agreed the terms of reference alongside the protocol that was agreed with Group Leaders at their meeting on

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20 March 2020.

Conclusions:

- 1.4 That the terms of reference of the Special Cabinet Panel, as set out in paragraph 4 of the report were noted

2. HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

[Officer Contact: Scott Crudginton, Director of Resources, Tel: 01992 555601]

- 2.1 Members received a report which provided a comprehensive update on Hertfordshire County Council's planning and response to Coronavirus (Covid-19). Members noted that the position continued to evolve rapidly.
- 2.2 Owen Mapley, Chief Executive began by paying a public tribute to the large number of council staff working intensely to continue providing services and to those working in front line roles alongside the NHS, including 30,000 working in care services across the county. This gratitude was echoed by all Members of the Special Cabinet Panel.
- 2.3 Members noted that with regards to Operation Shield, only 3,245 of approximately 8,450 residents that had indicated to Government that they needed supported had been contacted and queried what was being done to support the others. Officers advised that 8,450 residents had responded as a result of around 15,649 letters originally sent and that a list had now been received of all contact made with residents to date. All residents that had been written to were now being contacted to see if they required any assistance. Officers also advised that approximately another 8,000 residents were added to the shield list last week and that GP's had also been asked to check the lists to ensure that all those residents that should be shielded have been contacted. Members asked if the lists could be shared at district level to ensure that there were not any residents being missed locally. Officers advised that they would determine the best way of sharing this information with the district/borough councils. Officers advised that an advice leaflet was also due to be distributed to every home in Hertfordshire providing additional information on how to access support and that communications around Covid-19 would continue to be circulated via local media channels.

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- 2.4 In response to a Member question around the use of volunteers and volunteers not being contacted, officers advised that around 8000 people volunteered and around 2500 had already been deployed. Officers noted that they were trying to retain as many volunteers ready for deployment as suitable tasks grew. Members expressed concerns around 1:1 domiciliary care being offered to volunteers. Officers advised that care workers were being recruited with appropriate training/pay and that any inappropriate volunteering positions being recruited via care agencies should be reported to the Director of Adult Care Services.
- 2.5 Members discussed taking on board learnings to date as well as acknowledging the fantastic partnership arrangements that had been seen. Concerns were raised around messages being shared with shielded residents by GPs and care providers regarding resuscitation and the need to have a will in place. Officers advised that a letter had been sent to all GPs and care providers providing additional advice as some were following initial guidance stringently. A copy of this will be provided to Members. In addition, Members discussed food parcels being sent to those that did not necessarily need them along with the content of them being inappropriate as they were either of catering size or did not account for dietary requirements. Officers took this on board and advised that packs were now being better prepared and dietary requirements and nutritional balance were being taken into account. In addition, it was noted that the County Council was also supporting foodbanks.
- 2.6 In response to a Member question, it was noted that the third bullet point of 6.2, should read that the process would free up an extra 250 care beds not two as detailed in the report.
- 2.7 Members expressed a concern around patients being released from hospital back to a care home or hospices without being tested for Covid-19 and queried what processes were in place to ensure that Covid-19 was not being transmitted into already vulnerable locations. Officers advised that where tests had not been undertaken prior to a patient leaving hospital or test results were not yet available, NHS guidelines were being followed and patients treated as having Covid-19 and cared for using Personal Protection Equipment (PPE). It was also noted that where possible, patients were being discharged home rather than into care homes. Officers advised that Hertfordshire was in a slightly better position than others with regards to PPE, in that the County Council had sourced a large quantity and was able to dispatch it immediately to care homes that had run out or had low quantities.
- 2.8 In response to a Member question regarding Covid-19 patients being transferred to care homes for end of life care and the affect that this had on reported death statistics, officers advised that the

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national daily statistics only reported hospital deaths and this was in line with the way in which deaths were reported internationally. It was noted that the statistics would catchup with all Covid-19 deaths reported within 14 - 17days. Additionally, it was noted that care home deaths were beginning to be recorded daily and that once robust process was in place, care home deaths would also be reported daily. Officers reassured Members that a number of statistics were key to determining the peak of the outbreak.

- 2.9 In response to a Member question regarding how free school meals could be accessed by those families self-isolating and those without a choice to suit dietary requirements, officers advised that vouchers were being promoted in these instances. It was noted that schools that used Herts Catering were providing a food choice, however not all schools used this service. Any schools that were only giving the choice to collect food direct from the school was to be referred to Simon Newland, Operations Director, Education.
- 2.10 Concerns were expressed around teenage mental health and officers advised that work was ongoing with a whole range of services within the County Council to address this. It was noted that the Director of Public Health was putting together a webinar for young people addressing mental health. Officers also advised that messages were being provided via social media to help with issues such as mental health and domestic abuse and that an email address was available for those wanting to report abuse but unable to make a phone call.
- 2.11 With regards to infrastructure, Members noted that some pathways had now become overgrown and were causing social distancing issues as the routes were too narrow. Officers advised that works were beginning and grass cutting was to resume in the next week. Officers advised that Members should email in any concerns direct to the right-of-way team or Highways Members Enquiries.
- 2.12 Members commented on a negative report in the Watford Observer regarding Ringway contractors undertaking unessential work. Officers acknowledged the inaccurate report and advised that they would liaise with the press team to provide a response.
- 2.13 In response to a request for further messages to be circulated regarding not having bonfires at home, it was noted that the district/borough councils, along with the fire service and police were continuing to work partnership to spread the message.
- 2.14 In response to a Member question, officers advised that there had been approximately 10% County Council staff absence due self-isolating or Covid-19. It was noted that the figures were below

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worst-case planning and that all services were working within business continuity plan staffing limits. With regards to contractors, it was noted that some areas have faced pressures but had been able to maintain services.

- 2.15 Gratitude was expressed to the residents of Hertfordshire, with it noted that over 90% of residents had observed the lockdown measures.
- 2.16 The full debate for this item can be found here [Special Cabinet Panel - Item 3 Covid-19 Finance Update](#) at 28:02:00.

Conclusion:

- 2.17 The Cabinet Panel noted the report.

3. HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S FINANCE UPDATE IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

[Officer Contact: Steven Pilsworth, Assistant Director Finance, Tel: 01992 555737)

- 3.1 The Panel received a report which provided an update on Hertfordshire County Council's financial position in response to Covid-19, and to seek Members agreement to the proposed financial package to ensure services were maintained and communities were supported.
- 3.2 The Panel were informed that the County Council had made a decision that suppliers of equipment were paid immediately once invoices were received rather than the normal 30-day payment term to extend cash flow support to all suppliers.
- 3.3 Member heard the Minister of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had asked councils to make returns on the financial pressure on a weekly basis, however, the sum position is that all pressures for the County Council exceeded the Governments funding allocation of £26m, the County Councils pressure was currently at £35m. It was noted the Government would need to triple funding in order to cover Covid-19 spending and that if the pandemic went on longer then there would be a financial gap in the County Council's budget if the Government did not support further funding. It was also noted there could potentially be a shortfall in council tax precepts if the expected amount of council tax was not collected by district and borough councils. This would mean they would need to borrow money to ease the shortfall but this would have an impact on the residents, this in turn would have an impact on the County Council who would also need to borrow money to ease the shortfall if precepts

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were not received. The County Councils stance is the precept would be met and that the Council would enter into discussions with districts and boroughs, where necessary, and a payment plan would be agreed to minimise impact.

- 3.4 Members of the Panel raised concerns regarding the funding pledged by Government not being released and that this would have an impact on local authorities, as this money had already been spent on addressing the most urgent issues of Covid-19. Members agreed the Government needed to be held accountable to its pledge.
- 3.5 Many concerns were raised by the Panel in relation to loss of income and savings not achieved; the pay award of 2.75% that was made but rejected by the unions; structuring of council tax precept for district and boroughs; business grants and the difficulty in getting these to the smaller businesses; hardship funds and the recovery plan.
- 3.6 In relation to the pay award the Director of Resources informed the Panel that the County Council had allocated 2.25% in its budget and if the pay award was any higher than this then it would create further pressures for the council current years budget and future IP years pressures. It was noted that if the pay award was agreed higher then the gap would need to be met and this would be through the reduction of council services and further efficiency plans.
- 3.7 The Panel were informed in relation to council tax, precept offers had already been made to district and borough councils and these would be discussed where necessary.
- 3.8 In terms of the recovery plan, it was noted that this had already commenced for the Integrated Plan budget preparations for 2021/2022 and there was already a gap of £15m that had previously been identified. Officers were working on how to address the economic issues and were working with contractors to ensure contracts remained in place or renewed.
- 3.9 In relation to the £23m that Adult Social Care had received in funding, it was noted there were new recruits to care homes, in addition care providers have added costs to their budgets for essential equipment which they have been asked to absorb, hotels have helped with homelessness, beds were being brought for care providers, more assistance has been given to mental health and there is also the sustainability of the 'Shield' programme. Members agreed that co-operation across strong partnerships would be essential to ease the financial pressures.

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- 3.10 Clarification was received in relation to the budget to cover the twelve-week isolation as detailed at Appendix A to the report where the £35m was County Council's costs only and the other £12m was NHS and pooled budgets. Members heard some of the costs to the NHS would possibly fall to the County Council. If the isolation period was to go on for longer than twelve weeks, then the pressures on the budget would rise.
- 3.11 Members were informed there were various task force groups that were working at county and district and borough levels to address the economic issues and were lobbying relevant authorities.
- 3.12 In response to a Member question in relation to working practices going forward, the Chief Executive advised the Panel that working ways would be reviewed such as unnecessary travel to and from meetings and the flexibility of how work could be carried out for those in clerical, administrative and front line roles. There were more challenging areas for instance how staff have been working at home but it would not be sustainable permanently due to individuals not having specific work stations set up at home and those having to juggle caring responsibilities etc.
- 3.13 In response to a Member question in relation to pensions the Panel were informed the County Council has its own treasury function and it was monitored daily. Officers were happy to confirm there is sufficient cash balance available for the foreseeable future.
- 3.14 Following discussions in relation to a suggestion for a collective, cross party response to be made to Government, the Panel resolved that the Chairman of the Special Cabinet Panel writes to Hertfordshire MP's, copying in The Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, to highlight the pressures on the County Council's and district and boroughs financial positions and the need for continued funding to support the Covid-19 pandemic and the potential impact on future budgets if support is not received*.
- *Following this Special Cabinet Panel meeting, on Saturday 18 April 2020, Central Government announced additional funding for Local Government. Therefore, this resolution was not passed to Cabinet. The full financial update report was discussed at Cabinet on 20 April 2020 and can be viewed here: www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/watchmeetings.
- 3.15 The full debate for this item can be found here [Special Cabinet Panel - Item 3 Covid-19 Finance Update](#) at 01:58:30.

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Conclusions:

- 3.16 That Panel recommended to Cabinet that Cabinet:
- i) note the significant financial implications that COVID-19 is having on the County Council, including that the forecast of £35m of cost in the current financial year exceeds the £26m funding made available from Government;
 - ii) note the likely further financial implications in future years, and that current savings plans must continue to be delivered where possible to prevent further deterioration in the financial position;
 - iii) note the lobbying already underway with Government over the financial position, including the letter from the County Councils Network as appended to the report; and
 - iv) approve the proposed financial package to support communities as detailed in Appendix A to the report.

4. PUBLIC PETITIONS

4.1 There were no public petitions.

5. OTHER PART 1 BUSINESS

5.1 There was no other Part I business

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CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER

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