

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Virtual Meeting held on Thursday, 25th March, 2021 at 7.00 pm.

Voting Members

Cllr Mrs. D.B. Bedford (Vice-Chairman) (In the Chair)
Cllr Veronica Graham-Green (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr T.D. Bridgeman
Cllr Sue Carter
Cllr R.M. Cooper
Cllr Christine Guinness
Cllr L. Jeffers
Cllr J.H. Marsh
Cllr S.J. Masterson

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Cllr Gaynor Austin, Cllr Mara Makunura and Cllr M.D. Smith

29. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 4th February, 2021 were agreed as a correct record

30. CABINET CHAMPIONS

The Committee welcomed the three Cabinet Champions, Cllr Sue Carter (COVID-19 Recovery Champion), Cllr Peter Cullum (Education and Skills Champion) and Cllr Jacqui Vosper (Armed Forces Champion) who had been invited to give reports on their work during the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

Education and Skills – Cllr Peter Cullum gave an overview of his year as Education and Skills Champion. It was noted that the Council had a limited statutory input in local education and any initiatives had to be carried out with support from the County Council and national educational organisations.

Cllr Cullum advised that initially he had met with the County Council Education and Skills Portfolio Holder, Cllr Roz Chadd, to get a general overview of the situation across the County. This had led to meetings with the head teachers at the local secondary schools and colleges, local employment agencies and representatives from the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) to further discuss education and employment opportunities for young people. During these discussion it was evident that Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths should be encouraged in the local schools due to the aerospace focus within the Borough. As a result, Cllr Cullum advised that he, in consultation with the Royal Aeronautical Society (RAeS), had

arranged engagement for the schools with a project called “Cool Aeros”. This initiative invited young people to consider aerospace opportunities.

A sense of place had also been raised as an issue for Rushmoor’s young people. Cllr Cullum advised that he was currently in the process of creating an infographic highlighting the major features of the Borough to help young people gain a sense of place.

Other initiatives included apprenticeship schemes and work was being undertaken with the Council’s employment support officer and the FSB to establish the benefits of these government schemes.

The Committee discussed the report and raised queries around grading and Ofsted reports and mental health issues as a result of the pandemic. It was noted that it was difficult to know at present data was not readily available. However, individual schools would be able to provide information on their particular circumstances, especially around the grading of year 11 pupils.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Cullum for his report.

Armed Forces – Cllr Jacqui Vosper advised that a number of projects had not been progressed due to the pandemic during 2020/21. However, some activities had continued, including:

- Covenant Legislation – Cllr Vosper advised that she had led a Housing Sub Group which had been established to look at homelessness and housing allocation for service and ex-service personnel to inform the legislation of the Armed Forces Bill which was currently being considered in Parliament.
- COVID Response - The Council had liaised with the Military on issues relating to the pandemic, in particular, to ensure that messaging had been integrated and consistent.
- Census 2021 – Work had been ongoing regarding the arrangements for Census 2021. Liaison work would continue until late April, 2021.
- Education - The Covenant Partnership has been looking at outcomes for students from military families, particularly at A-Level, and the prospects for attending university/higher education. Work with Hart, Basingstoke and Deane and representatives from the 6th Form College was underway to look at improved data collection to help understand this issue in more detail.
- Events – It was reported that events had been limited during the pandemic with the exception of VE and VJ days and the Remembrance events. It was hoped that more events would start to be held towards the end of 2021 and into 2022.
- Garrison Community Hub – it was advised that the military had been upgrading and extending the offer at the former Connaught Centre – this included work on a new café and meeting space and an outdoor playground.

Later in the year the facility would be made available for use to the wider community as well as those with a military connection, such as local veterans. In addition, for the local veterans, a hub would be opened at the Military Museum and a repair café in Aldershot Town Centre later in the year.

- Defence Employers' Recognition Scheme Gold Award - In 2019, it was noted that the Council had the Silver Award. Consideration was now being given to making an application for the Gold Award. It was noted that a number of changes would need to be made to the Council's working arrangements and these would need to be demonstrated over a period of time. It was hoped that the application would be made in 2023.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Vosper for her presentation.

COVID-19 Response – Cllr Sue Carter reported that there were a lot of positives happening locally despite the difficulties presented by the pandemic. The Helpline and local response networks, set up through Rushmoor Voluntary Services (RVS), had dealt with over 1,300 cases to date. A key outcome from this work would be to embed some of the positive changes into business as usual work.

Other areas where Cllr Carter had been able to get involved included:

- Education – The closure of the schools had had a huge impact on teachers, families and children. The circumstances had had an impact on the mental health of some young people and organisations such as CAMHS, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Hampshire County Council (HCC) were providing measures to help in this area.
- Rushmoor Youth Forum – Cllr Carter advised on the Rushmoor Youth Forum (RYF). The Forum brought together 32 agencies to work collaboratively to move support work forward to help address issues present in young people. Rushmoor Youth Influence (RYI), a group established for 15-30 year olds, fed into the work of the RYF giving the perspective of the younger generation to the work to the Forum. It was hoped that the work of the RYI group would grow to incorporate a buddying scheme to raise confidence and inspire each other.

The Council's Supporting Communities Strategy has identified young people as a priority group. The role of the RYF would be pivotal to engaging young people, prioritising their needs and identifying projects to support them in the longer term recovery phase.

It was hoped that a Shadow Youth Council (SYC) could be launched in September, following the beginning of the new school year. By launching a SYC it would allow young people to have a place to speak and be heard alongside gaining an understanding of local government and the voluntary sector. A SYC would be able to help articulate the needs of young people in a post COVID society and support the Council's main priorities, such as tackling climate change.

- Communications – it was noted that the arrangements for Members to receive regular briefings throughout the pandemic had worked well enabling information to be provided quickly and effectively. The extensive work with the Nepali community had also been noted.
- Vaccination Sites – it was noted that the sites had been in operation since December, 2020. Although they were operated by the NHS, the Council had been providing support. Vaccination availability had been an issue, but the numbers vaccinated across Rushmoor was a credit to partnership working.
- Physical and Mental Health and Wellbeing – This was a huge area being worked on by many partner agencies which affected many people, young and old. Signposting to help was being carried out through social media and it was important to ensure schools/pupils had access to relevant information.

In addition, it was also advised that communities were working together on initiatives, in particular Men's Shed facilities in Westheath and Aldershot Town Centre. The Men's Sheds would be a community and skills sharing hub for both men and women.

- Rushmoor Food Hub – this initiative would be central to the recovery process. Using Government funding it was intend to provide a community driven solution to support the local community.
- Partnership working – during the pandemic evidence of strong partnerships work between the public and voluntary/community sectors had emerged. The Council had developed strong working relationships with many organisations which would assist in the recovery processes and help deliver lasting improvements to the local community. Key partners included North East Hampshire and Farnham Clinical Commissioning Group, Hampshire Adults and Children Services, Citizens' Advice, RVS and VIVID Housing. This work would give a robust platform to move forward and address health and wellbeing issues.

In response to a query regarding feedback from residents on the Borough's handling of the pandemic it was acknowledged that most feedback had been extremely positive. It was noted that thanks should be conveyed to the Officers and partner organisation/charities for their hard work and efforts during these extremely challenging times.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Carter for her report.

31. **AIR POLLUTION**

The Committee welcomed Operational Services Manager, Colin Alborough, and Environment and Airport Monitoring Officer, Richard Ward, who were in attendance to give a presentation on air pollution issues across the Borough.

Mr. Ward, gave an overview of the team that sat within Operational Services. The Environmental Control and Pollution Team covered several other areas in addition to

air quality management these included, statutory nuisance, noise nuisance and animal licensing. It was noted that Mr. Ward was the lead officer for local air quality management and also had responsibility for air quality issues relating to commercial and domestic bonfires, planning consultations and policy and was the regulator for 27 permitted installations across the borough for the Local Air Pollution Prevention and Control (LAPPC) process.

Air pollution was very varied and complex, with a large number of contributors. Pollutants could have both short and longer term effect on the health of the population and had the most effect on the most vulnerable.

The team worked within the remit of frameworks set out by the Environment Act and the National Air Quality Strategy. It was noted that monitoring in Rushmoor was primarily based around nitrogen dioxide, for which there were currently 20 monitoring sites across the Borough. Reports on the data from this monitoring, which showed a gradual reduction over time across all sites, were submitted to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on an annual basis.

The Committee were also advised of ongoing projects on the M3 and A331. The A331 project had commenced in 2017 and through partnership working with neighbouring authorities, work had been undertaken to reduce nitrogen dioxide on the A331. A speed restriction of 50mph had been implemented in June 2019 on a 1.8km stretch of the road to assist in reducing nitrogen dioxide levels.

Looking to the future, it was advised that consideration would be given to the content of the Environment Bill due to be signed off later in 2021, this was expected to include longer term targets for air quality measures and an annual mean level for PM2.5 (particulate matter) levels. The Council's Climate Change Action Plan would also impact on the work of the team.

The Committee discussed the presentation and raised a number of queries.

In relation to the impact of the pandemic on pollution levels it was noted that it had been too early to determine the long term effects. However after the initial lockdown levels had been slowly creeping back up to normal.

With regard to having a local impact on nitrogen dioxide levels, it was noted that objectives in the Council's Climate Change Action Plan and work carried out by Hampshire County Council with school children to educate and raise awareness on the subject of air pollution would help on a local level to improve air quality.

In response to a query regarding wood burners and their impact on air pollution, it was noted that wood burning stoves contributed to a third of PM2.5 in the air. It was thought that moving forward, smoke control areas and regulation on target levels may be introduced to control the use of these heat sources.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Ward for his presentation.

32. HOUSING OPTIONS UPDATE

The Committee welcomed the Housing Options Service Manager, Suzannah Hellicar, to give an update on the work of the Housing Options Team and in particular the impacts of COVID-19.

Ms Hellicar, advised that as Service Manager she had responsibility for housing, homelessness, housing options and private sector housing. The move to remote working had meant that home visits and face to face interviews had been restricted but the Team had been able to provide a full service to its customers during the previous twelve months. A challenge for the Team had been keeping in contact with some of their homeless clients and mobile phone had been provided to a number of these individuals which had assisted with this issue. A big positive to come from the pandemic had been the partnership working, organisations and charities had come together to provide for those in need at this difficult time and the Team had adapted amazingly to the challenges faced.

In March 2020, the Government instructed local authorities to accommodate all rough sleepers, through the "Everyone In" scheme. Locally 150 vulnerable people had been accommodated and a benefit to come from this had been engagement with some individuals who had previously refused help. Some challenges resulting from the scheme had been anti-social behavior, costs of accommodation and future accommodation options. It was noted that VIVID Housing Association had provided significant support during this time.

The Committee was advised of the outreach work that had taken place. It was noted that some individuals had refused the offer of accommodation and the Team had provided PPE, food parcels, sleeping bags, support and continued offers of accommodation during the height of the pandemic. It was reported that four individuals had remained on the street.

It was advised that the eviction ban on private and social tenants was expected to remain in place until May, 2021. The Team had been working with landlords and tenants to resolve issues and were proactively looking to provide alternative accommodation where possible in cases where eviction was pending and matters couldn't be resolved.

Ms Hellicar explained the Housing First project, a scheme being carried out in partnership with Two Saints and VIVID Housing Associations to house the Boroughs most vulnerable residents. In April 2021, five units, provided by VIVID, would be available for use in this project. The Council would identify individuals who would benefit the most from the scheme and Two Saints would deliver the intensive support required to each resident. It was noted that an application had been made for five additional properties through the Rough Sleeper Fund.

Moving forward, it was noted that a small team would return to the office in April, 2021 to deal with demand. It was thought that demand would relate to eviction, the rise in unemployment figures and relationship and mental health breakdown. A new customer online portal and software package was also planned to be introduced to assist with demand. In addition, it was noted that the Rough Sleeper Strategy was

due to be presented to Cabinet in April, 2021 for adoption. The Team would also continue to build on the work with partners particularly around the development of the Temporary Accommodation Strategy.

The Committee discussed the presentation and raise a number of concerns. In response to a query regarding the numbers on the housing list it was noted that the Team had not seen a big influx, with the number remaining at around 1,400 – 1,500. It was thought this could increase as the situation evolved.

With regard to bed and breakfast accommodation, it was noted that the duration of a stay was limited wherever possible and suitable alternatives were sought quickly. Alternative accommodation, such as housing pods/containers, had been considered but it had been found that installation of services could be expensive depending on the site. However, if the right site became available this option could be considered moving forward.

Following a discussion on Clayton Court, it was noted that negotiations were underway to consider extending the lease on the property. It was advised that the site wasn't always appropriate and options for alternative temporary accommodation were being considered to add to the portfolio of available temporary housing. It was noted that currently there were two empty rooms in Clayton Court.

The Chairman congratulated and thanked Ms Hellicar and her team for the work they had carried out over the past twelve months.

33. **WORK PLAN**

The current Work Plan was **NOTED** and an update was provided as follows:

- It was noted that the annual report would be prepared for the Council meeting on 22nd April
- A meeting of the Educational Improvement and Highways Agency Task and Finish Groups would be scheduled for early in the new Municipal Year

The meeting closed at 9.09 pm.

CLLR D.B. BEDFORD (VICE-CHAIRMAN) (IN THE CHAIR)
