

Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

Thursday 18 June 2020 at 5.45pm

Present: Councillor L Giles (Chair)
Councillors E M Giles and Singh.

Officers: David Stevens (Chief Executive), Neil Cox (Director – Prevention and Protection), Elaine Newsome (Service Manager – Democracy), Suky Suthi-Nagra (Democratic Services Manager) and Surjit Tour (Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer).

4/20 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Moore. The Chair, on behalf of the Board, wished him a speedy recovery.

5/20 **Matter of Urgency**

There were no additional items of business to consider as matters of urgency. The Chair notified the Board that he would be requesting reports to be brought to the next meeting in relation to meeting the financial challenges caused by COVID-19 and resourcing of Sandwell Leisure Trust.

6/20 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interests declared at the meeting.

7/20 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2020 were agreed as a correct record.



COVID-19 Reset and Recovery Planning

The Board considered the Reset and Recovery Framework that had been agreed by Emergency Committee at its meeting held on 27 May 2020 (Minute No. 34/20 refers). The aim of the Reset and Recovery Framework is to develop resourced business plans that would achieve the strategic outcomes set out in the Corporate Plan 'Big Plans for a Great Place', as approved by Council in March 2020.

The Council was implementing a phased approach to reset and recovery, while retaining flexibility to meet emerging challenges or changes in circumstances such as any future periods of lockdown. Currently the Council's activity was moving from the response phase to the recovery phase – initially the focus was on moving out of the lockdown situation. There was a need to ensure the safety of both staff and service users throughout this period and risk assessments were being undertaken to identify mitigating actions that may be required.

Looking ahead, it was clear that there was an opportunity to change the way in which the Council carried out its work and delivered services. Throughout the response phase of the pandemic, a high proportion of staff had successfully operated remotely working at home. The Council was capturing the lessons from staff throughout this period to understand what worked and how to address barriers that arose.

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

- As elderly people and people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds were disproportionately impacted upon by COVID-19 it was important to ensure these groups are considered across all aspects of reset and recovery.
- Counsel guidance commissioned by the Local Government Association advised that meetings of elected members should take place virtually whilst regulations are in effect. The practicality of holding meetings of full Council was an issue, officers were in contact with colleagues in other authorities to share learning about holding larger meetings online. Currently it was planned to re-commence full Council meetings in autumn 2020.
- Officers were working to ensure that all elected members had the necessary equipment to take part in online meetings – approximately 30 councillors required new equipment, which was in the process of being rolled out.

- The Council was working to reopen buildings in a safe way alongside staff and the Trade Unions. However, it was recognised that without significant changes in circumstances, such as a vaccine for COVID-19, buildings would not be able to accommodate the same number of staff as before the pandemic.
- Whilst it was important to re-open services such as cashiers to allow residents to pay bills, this had to be done in a way that was safe for both staff and customers. This required appropriate signage and equipment to be in place. It was noted that bills could still be paid at Post Offices throughout the COVID-19 lockdown.

The Board thanked all officers of the Council for their hard work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Chair offered a commitment from the Scrutiny function to support the reset and recovery activity going forward.

9/20

Executive Forward Plan

The Board received the Executive Forward Plan for July 2020.

Meeting ended at 6.19pm