

## **COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Thursday, 16 July 2020

**PRESENT** – Councillors Renton (Chair), Allen, Bartch, Cossins, Mrs Culley, Donoghue, Durham, Haszeldine, McCollom, Tait and Wallis

**APOLOGIES** –

**ABSENT** –

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** – Councillors Dulston and Keir

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Ian Thompson (Assistant Director Community Services), Dave Winstanley (Assistant Director Capital Projects, Transport and Highways Planning), Brian Graham (Head of Environmental Services), Sharon Raine (Head of Performance and Transformation), Natasha Telfer (Strategy and Performance Manager) and Hannah Fay (Democratic Officer)

### **CLS7 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Renton declared an interest as a Trustee of Darlington Support; Councillor Culley declared an interest as a Trustee of Darlington Support; Councillor Cossins declared an interest as a volunteer for Darlington Support; and Councillor Durham declared an interest as a ward coordinator for Darlington Support.

### **CLS8 COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES - COVID-19**

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the response of the Council to COVID-19, including the Darlington Community Support Hub (report also previously circulated); and the decisions taken with regard to the services relevant to this Committee.

The submitted report outlined the key dates relating to the Government's response to the COVID-19 outbreak, including the UK wide lockdown on 23 March 2020; the publication of the 'Our plan to rebuild: the UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy' on 11 May 2020; and the establishment of the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund on 24 May 2020, which Darlington would be submitting an application towards to receive £94K.

The Council in line with the County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum (LRF) invoked its emergency plan and coordinated a joint response to the pandemic; a Strategic Coordinating Group was established to enable strategic decisions to be made; and this was stood down on 3 July with responsibility handed over to the Recovery Coordination Group for the recovery phase.

Details were provided of the delegated decisions taken in response to the pandemic; where services were stood down, staff were redeployed to essential services such as the Darlington Community Support Hub, with a skills matrix completed for requirements of hub roles; and a number of staff were furloughed, receiving pay in

line with their contracts.

Reference was made to Street Scene Services, which were stopped from 24 March 2020 with the exception of refuse and recycling collection; highway maintenance schemes were put on hold at the onset of COVID-19; highway improvement schemes construction sites were closed during lockdown, with preparation to reopen sites commencing on 25 May; and an assessment process was undertaken by officers to enable some non-essential shops in the town centre to re-open safely following the Government announcement on 26 May.

An interim home library service was provided to residents over 60 years of age during lockdown; with 233 people benefiting from the scheme; Darlington Hippodrome had been focusing on rescheduling shows where possible into Autumn 2020 and Spring 2021, and communicating these updates to customers; and Creative Darlington had supported nine 'Darlo@Home' online concerts which ran between 10 April and 2 May 2020.

Following Government guidance Darlington Community Support Hub was established, providing support to those residents at greatest risk as a result of COVID-19. A list of residents at greatest risk was provided by the Government and was developed over a number of weeks following additional information received from NHS England, GP's and residents; and there were a total of 5600 residents on this list. Work was undertaken in partnership with established community and voluntary sectors to ensure their offer was incorporated into the hub.

Details were provided of the key milestones of the hub; the hub became operational on 24 March 2020; and had taken 7564 calls from the shielded and vulnerable, delivered 697 food packages and 258 medicine packages between 23 March to 30 June 2020. The final weekend of operating hours for the hub was 27 June, after which the work of the hub moved to Adult Social Care; and all residents on the shielded list received a letter outlining the continued support available.

Discussion ensued in respect of delays to the building works, as part of the Darlington Crematorium refurbishment due to COVID-19; reinstatement of the Scarlet Band bus service; and the decision to close Darlington Borough Council buildings to the public before government advice was issued.

Members queried the decision made to not empty street litter and dog bins and noted that the decision was made following government guidance for people to stay at home; that the Council had a duty to protect its staff and as such the service was stood down to enable staff to remain at home. Residents were asked to take their litter home and labels were placed on bins to encourage this.

Following a question by Members, the Assistant Director Community Services advised that there had been a great deal of lessons learned in respect of the response to the outbreak; these lessons had been captured following debriefs with senior officers; as we were now in the recovery phase it was essential to gain an understanding of the needs of the community to be able to respond to any present and future challenges.

Concern was raised in respect of the recently launched e-scooter trial in the Tees

Valley. The Assistant Director Transport and Capital Projects advised Members that work was being undertaken in respect of the implementation of this trial in Darlington; the use of e-scooters would be on roads only; and an equality impact assessment was underway.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the report be noted.

(b) That the effort and dedication of staff during this period be recognised.

**CLS9 SUPPLEMENTARY ITEM(S) (IF ANY) WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR OF THIS COMMITTEE ARE OF AN URGENT NATURE AND CAN BE DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING.**

**(1) TO CONSIDER THE TIMES OF MEETINGS OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2020/21**

Discussion ensued on times of meetings with consideration given to 10.00am, 4.00pm and 6.00pm as possible options.

**RESOLVED** – That meetings of this Scrutiny Committee be held at 10.00am for the remainder of the 2020/21 Municipal Year and that meetings be held at 6.00pm as and when required.

**(2) WORK PROGRAMME**

The Managing Director submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme for the Municipal Year 2020/2021 and to consider any additional areas to be included.

A discussion was held in respect of the current items on the work programme and a number of new items were proposed; these included Northgate Initiative; Back Lanes; Drug and Alcohol Services; CCTV Services; Library Services; and the Hippodrome.

**RESOLVED** – That the Work Programme be updated to reflect the decisions of this Scrutiny Committee.