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Minutes of the meeting of the STRATEGIC PLACEMAKING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on THURSDAY 9 JULY at 7.00 PM

Present: Councillor P Geary (Chair)
Councillors Bint, K Bradburn, Crooks, Gilbert, Legg, Long, McPake, Petchey and Priestley

Officers: S Proffitt (Director Environment and Property), N Hannon (Head of Environment and Waste), D Millership (Head of Highways), D Proctor (Waste Services Client Manager) and R Tidman (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

Also present: Councillor Darlington

SP03 DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interests.

SP04 MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meetings of the Strategic Placemaking Scrutiny Committee held on 4 March 2020 and 20 May 2020 be approved and signed by the Chair as correct records

SP05 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON PUBLIC REALM SERVICES AND ROAD CLOSURES

**Witnesses: Cllr Darlington (Cabinet member for Public Realm),
S Proffitt (Director Environment and Property),
N Hannon (Head of Environment and Waste),
D Millership (Head of Highways),
D Proctor (Waste Services Client Manager)**

The Cabinet member for Public Realm introduced the item with a presentation that set out the impact of the pandemic on public realm services and road closures. It was generally noted by all present that the contribution of everyone involved with delivering public realm services in Milton Keynes had been immense and that the efforts of all staff to get us through the crisis so far should be celebrated.

In response to questions the Committee noted that:

- (a) There was an effective client team in place managing a range of services. This integrated approach allowed for staff redeployment etc;
- (b) Members, parish councillors and the public were generally kept well informed particularly via social media or regular email updates. However, people who did not use social media would have struggled to keep up to date;
- (c) 'Normal' service would not resume at waste centres for some time due to social distancing guidelines. The booking system that was introduced was providing data on demand for the first time and identifying abuse of use of the centres by people outside of Milton Keynes and those hiding commercial waste as domestic. Officers were constantly reviewing the number of slots, opening hours and feedback from users;
- (d) Except for the facility at Bleak Hall the availability of slots was generally good and generally never booked to 100% of capacity;
- (e) There had been some issues with waste vehicles that had been hired over this period that were set up differently to the usual ones;
- (f) Plans for reopening should have considered the demand and increased traffic and litter at places such as MK1 and popular takeaways;

- (g) There was concern expressed as to whether there were effective plans in place to coordinate and advise public transport providers if roads were closed;
- (h) National government should look first to local authorities to deliver at a local level rather than to private contractors;
- (i) Comparisons with other similar authorities or those that border us was helpful to compare our own activity and decision-making processes;
- (j) The three elements that were identified as going well was that waste and recycling services were protected, no family had to wait to bury a loved one and traffic management was implemented successfully where required;
- (k) The elements that did not go so well was the communications from government to local authorities and the timelines that were given to implement certain actions;
- (l) One of the major lessons learned was around communication practices particularly with ward councillors and this is something that would be developed and continued;
- (m) The hierarchy of services was a useful guide to help make decisions and stratify risk, statutory requirements and public expectations. Reprioritisation of services happened throughout lockdown although some nuances to this could be debated if required going forward;
- (n) Many of the changes could have been anticipated at an earlier stage of lockdown for example as more people were at home there was an increase in household waste, more people out walking meant more litter outside of the central area;
- (o) Data would be helpful including out of borough use, car throughput, tonnage per trip, public feedback etc;
- (p) In the initial stages of lockdown waste crews had raised concerns about PPE and social distancing in the cabs but these issues were later resolved;
- (q) Customer service staff did exceptionally well with the resources they had to work with but greater investment was required to improve the customer experience particularly the difference between online and phone service;
- (r) Some Council messages did not apply to unadopted areas and the Communications Team needed to be aware of this as it could cause confusion;

- (s) Councillors had volunteered for roles such as delivering recycling sacks and they could be utilised going forward to deliver for example bins to new residential properties;
- (t) Officers needed to follow up with the organisers of the testing station to ensure that appropriate processes were in place in the future;
- (u) Regarding high street road closures, the council was asked by government to facilitate the reopening of non-essential shops by allowing increased social distancing on all the high streets. There was only seven days to put this in place and consultation was carried out with ward and town councillors as well as with as many businesses as possible. Decisions had to be made without the benefit of a full business database and needing to estimate how many shops might reopen. These were always planned to be soft closures with access to buses, deliveries and residents. The road closures were flexible and officers need to weigh up all feedback to provide a consensus approach; and
- (v) Understanding the principles behind the reopening decisions of both the waste centres and the high streets would be helpful to improve decision making in the event of any future occurrences.

RESOLVED –

1. That it be noted that the Committee expressed their thanks to all Council staff and contractors who continued to deliver a high standard of public realm services, particularly throughout the 'Lockdown' period of the Covid-19 Pandemic.
2. That the Planning Group prepare a report for the Covid-19 Task and Finish Group that identifies what the service area should do differently in the event of any future similar events.
3. That the guidance from government on dealing with contractors during Covid-19 be circulated to the Committee.

SP07

THE EXPANSION OF MILTON KEYNES

Councillor Crooks provided a brief introduction to this item setting out how this is planned to be taken forward to the next meeting of the Committee.

The gestation of the MK East Development Framework had raised a number of issues that the Council could learn from to create a model approach to be used in future expansion areas. Scrutiny of this would provide an opportunity to learn and add value to future development frameworks.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Planning Group along with Councillors Bint and Bradburn develop a report for the next meeting that looks at the lessons that should be learnt from the process of developing the MK East Development Framework.

SP08

2020/21 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received and noted the proposed Work Programme for 2020/21.

RESOLVED –

1. That the 2020/21 Work Programme be noted.
2. That if members of the Committee have any suggestions for items for scrutiny which are within the Committee's remit during 2020/21, they be fed into the Committee's Planning Group.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 9.00 PM

The recording of this meeting is available to view on the Council's YouTube Channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/user/MiltonKeynesCouncil/videos>