

Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny and Policy Development
Committee

Meeting held 24 November 2020

(NOTE: This meeting was held as a remote meeting in accordance with the provisions of The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.)

PRESENT: Councillors Denise Fox (Chair), Ian Auckland (Deputy Chair), Neale Gibson, Dianne Hurst, Alan Hooper, Abdul Khayum, Bryan Lodge, Mohammed Mahroof, Barbara Masters, Ben Miskell, Moya O'Rourke, Sioned-Mair Richards, Chris Rosling-Josephs, Martin Smith and Paul Turpin

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 No apologies for absence were received.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 In relation to Item 7 on the agenda (Call-In of the Cabinet Decision on Sheffield Covid Business Recovery Plan), Councillor Ben Miskell declared a personal interest as Cabinet Adviser for Business and Investment.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8th September 2020, were approved as a correct record and, arising therefrom, further to a query raised by Councillor Ian Auckland as to whether there had been any response from Sheffield City Trust (SCT), further to the request of the Committee for them to meet with members of a cross-party Task and Finish Group to review 'the future of leisure facilities past and present', the Chair (Councillor Denise Fox) updated the Committee on the current position. She stated that she had received a response from David Grey (Executive Chairman, SCT), which had been sent to all Members of the Committee, providing an explanation as to why SCT management had not been able to attend the previous meeting, and offering to attend a future meeting to discuss the issues further. Councillor Fox stated that she was to meet with officers in connection with the setting up of the Task and Finish Group, and would invite the Trust to its first meeting.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 There were no questions raised or petitions submitted by members of the public.

6. CALL-IN OF THE CABINET DECISION ON SHEFFIELD COVID BUSINESS RECOVERY PLAN

6.1 The Committee considered the following decision of the Cabinet at its meeting held on 21st October 2020:-

- (a) notes the role of the Council in developing the Sheffield Covid Business Recovery Plan as part of a collaboration with the Sheffield Covid Business Response Group;
- (b) endorses the Sheffield Covid Business Recovery Plan as a framework for action to help address the economic impacts of Covid;
- (c) notes and acknowledges the role the Council will play in delivering elements of the Plan as part of the Business Response Group, with the Plan informing the City's bids for Covid relief and recovery funding;
- (d) notes the collaborative approach taken to develop the action plan, creating the basis for a new long-term relationship with the private sector in Sheffield, working together to help to shape the City's long-term economic strategy; and
- (e) notes that a report seeking approval to establish a £2 million Fund to support interventions that address some of the economic impacts of Covid-19 would be considered by the Leader in early November.

6.2 Signatories

The lead signatory to the call-in was Councillor Martin Smith, and the other signatories were Councillors Ian Auckland , Alan Hooper, Mohammed Mahroof and Barbara Masters.

6.3 Reasons for the Call-In

The signatories wanted the Committee to scrutinise the decision, and the actions that the Council intended to take as a result of the Plan.

6.4 Attendees

- Edward Highfield (Director of City Growth)
- Alexis Krachai (Interim Executive Director of Sheffield Chamber of Commerce and Industry)

6.5 Edward Highfield introduced the report, indicating that the Sheffield Covid Business Recovery Plan was not purely a Council document, but had been

developed in partnership with the Business Response Group, which had been established in the early stages of the pandemic in an attempt to pull together the views of both the public and private sectors. The Group comprised representation from the Sheffield Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Sheffield Universities, the Sheffield Property Association, Sheffield Digital and Unight (a group representing the City's night-time economy), and was co-chaired by Councillor Mazher Iqbal (Cabinet Member for Business and Investment) and Alexis Krachai. The Group had been a positive and powerful collaboration, which had provided the foundations for the work to be carried out throughout the pandemic, and into the future. Mr Highfield stressed that the Plan related only to business recovery. The Business Response Group had undertaken some positive, early work in aligning all the different sources of support in an effort to ensure that as many businesses as possible would benefit. It was then proposed that a positive plan for the future would be established, hence the Sheffield Covid Business Recovery Plan. He referred to the six priorities set out in the Plan, which had been decided following input from the private sector and from discussions at various Member Working Groups.

- 6.6 Mr Highfield reported on the three phases of the Plan - Relief, Recovery and Renewal, and indicated that, whilst the Plan related to Sheffield only, it was closely connected to the Sheffield City Region (SCR) Plan, and that there was a possibility that the Council may seek to obtain resources from the SCR towards funding some of the objectives in the Plan. Many of the objectives in the Relief phase were largely focused on the Council, such as making things Covid-secure, work in connection with district centres and administering the Government grants. The Recovery phase would be where the Business Response Group would add most value, and where additional funding, over and above the Council's mainstream funding, could be used to drive projects. Reference was made to the additional £2 million the Council had allocated to a Covid Relief Fund, which would be used to pump-prime projects, using matched funding from the private sector. The Renewal phase was more focused on longer-term plans, and was strongly aligned to the SCR's Economic Recovery Plan. This phase would involve laying down principles that would hopefully go on to inform longer-term discussions about renewal and economic strategy.
- 6.7 Mr Highfield stated that the Plan was a framework which would provide the Council with a structure and a basis to have discussions about mainstream resource, any additional resource, and then to try to influence larger funding sources. The Plan would be constantly reviewed and adapted.
- 6.8 Alexis Krachai stated that the Plan represented a framework that enabled the partnership to use existing resources in the City. The City's response to the pandemic must be City-wide. It was hoped that the Plan would be used to leverage in support and funding from external parties, help to marshal existing resources, and which could adapt on the basis that the current position regarding the pandemic remained very fluid.
- 6.9 Members of the Committee raised questions, and the following responses were provided:-

- This was not a strategy to try and tackle every impact of Covid, but was a Business Recovery Plan, which primarily focused on the impact on businesses. It was accepted that those sectors which employed more people on lower wages, such as the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors, had been the hardest hit. The Plan focused on getting customers back which, in turn, would sustain such employment opportunities. The Plan placed an emphasis on skills, particularly in terms of young people, and also focused on enterprise and start-ups, in an attempt to try and get businesses back on their feet. The Council does not create businesses or provide people with skills or jobs, but the Plan aimed to create an environment where more people were supported or incentivised to create businesses. The Plan would grow and evolve, as well as be inclusive. The views of Unight had been carefully listened to, and the group had been invited to be a member of the Group. The Plan had a clear vision, which needed to be delivered as a City, both from a top-down perspective, as well as a bottom-up perspective, and that all required representatives to play a role in the process.
- There was no detailed data on the number of small local businesses which had folded yet, or the number of business start-ups there had been during the pandemic due to the lag on such data from the Office for National Statistic (ONS). This data needed to be assessed in conjunction with data provided by more intelligence- based sources, such as the Sheffield Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
- As the process was open and inclusive, every effort would be made to ensure that all relevant groups and organisations, such as the Sheffield Sustainability Network, as now suggested, would be listened to and/or included as a member of the Group.
- There were six posts of Information Officer, funded through the Economic Regeneration Development Fund (ERDF), responsible for engaging with the public in terms of providing help and advice in connection with plans to allow high streets to remain open safely. The officers had initially been based in the larger district centres, mainly in terms of prioritising their caseloads. The feedback from the public had been very positive, and the officers had been getting around and engaging with people. The plan was that they would work in all district centres. Members were encouraged to inform the Director of City Growth of any areas they believed the officers should visit, and a list would be compiled to ensure that they visited each district centre.
- There was a question in terms of office requirements in the City going forward, and what this would mean for future development schemes in the City. There were contrasting views on this issue, but it was clear that, post-pandemic, the quality of places, in terms of liveability, flexibility, public realm and links to green space, were going to be even more important. The design of office accommodation going forward was going to evolve in future years, and there would be a need to design such accommodation

which encouraged collaboration. It was still important that people starting their careers could experience the training and learning when at work, that was required for them to progress, specifically to learn from colleagues around them.

- The Director of City Growth received weekly data regarding indicators at both local and national level, which could be sent to Members of the Committee.
- Whilst the Federation of Small Businesses was not represented on the Business Response Group, the body was consulted on a regular basis. There were a number of individual small businesses represented on the Group, such as Unight. It was accepted that consideration needs to be given to how the Council engaged with small businesses, when many owners were currently struggling just to keep their businesses afloat.
- Specific examples of the projects in the Relief phase included the 'Make Yourself at Home' campaign, which aimed to try to get people to support their local independent retailers, both during the pandemic and beyond. The campaign involved a programme of awareness, support and encouragement about residents engaging with local independent traders/businesses. There were also plans to arrange a number of outdoor events, but there was obviously a major risk attached to such plans, particularly on the part of the prospective organisers. The Plan included action aimed at trying to de-risk such events, and possibly look to underwrite any events which were forced to be cancelled due to the pandemic. A further example related to freelancers, who made up a major part of the City's creative economy and, who, unfortunately, had missed out on the Government grants. The Plan could look to offer grants or commission some of their work.
- The situation regarding small businesses struggling to afford their rent and rates, a situation which was likely to result in a number of insolvencies, represented a major concern. The business rates system was in need of reform, and whilst the Council could not subsidise businesses' rents or rates, it could offer help and advice in terms of generating new customers and provide help to increase footfall in areas where they were located.
- The growth of local district centres in the City was critical going forward, and Sheffield had the benefit of the identity of such centres being very strong, and it was hoped that residents could be further encouraged to visit, and spend more, in their local district centres.
- Sheffield was very much a small business economy, and efforts would be made to ensure that all the City's small businesses could survive. The City's core element of growth would involve the growth of the existing businesses.
- Local and regional government could only do so much to influence the

overall performance of the City's economy. In terms of competition with other cities, both nationally and internationally, there were few things which made Sheffield stand out from others in terms of performance. The key to a successful economy was how the public and private sectors worked together. The Business Recovery Plan would only be delivered if parties worked together and were realistic as to what could be achieved. There was therefore the need to focus on the priorities set out in the Plan. Some of the objectives in the Plan could be delivered early on, whereas others could only be delivered with support from Central Government and/or Sheffield City Region. It was believed that the pandemic had provided the opportunity for the Council and the private sector to work more collaboratively, which would hopefully benefit the City going forward.

- The Chamber of Commerce and Industry had six different levels of membership in terms of businesses, from the largest businesses/organisations, such as the Universities, to small, independent retailers.
- £2 million had been identified in the Council's budget for developing district centres. A shadow Steering Group had been established to look at how this funding could be utilised. It was hoped that the Council could use this funding to lever in further funding from other public or private sources, and that it could be used for pilot projects.
- The Council had received some funding from 'Visit Britain' to look to develop the City as a visitor destination. Some work had been undertaken on the Outdoor City, which had included talking to the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive in connection with the provision of an overnight coach park in the City, which the City has never had, and which was believed to have had an adverse effect on the City's tourism ambitions in the past.
- Every effort would be made to try to encourage more people to use public transport although, given the current position, and the questions of the economic viability of some companies, this may prove very difficult. There were concerns that the potential withdrawal of services may result in a smaller network in the future. The Council had ambitious plans for making it easier and more attractive for people to walk or cycle more, but it was likely that such progress would have to be made in incremental steps over a long period of time.
- Several projects that would be funded through the Business Response Plan were in the Recovery phase, and in which the Business Response Group considered it could add the most value, with the second lockdown providing more time to get plans in place.
- It was acknowledged that there were issues with regard to the City Centre, in that footfall had already decreased prior to the pandemic, and which had decreased further due to the pandemic, mainly due to the absence of commuters and students, the closure of shops, pubs, restaurants and other

leisure facilities. The plan was to look at Fargate, not just as a retail destination, but for other uses, and to develop a better and wider mix of uses in an attempt to attract more people into the City Centre. There was a need for the Council to lobby the Government in connection with the Future High Streets Fund, particularly with regard to developing Fargate. The City Centre was constantly evolving, with footfall on The Moor having increased following the refurbishment works and the new shopping offer. It was important that there was enough in the City Centre, including shops, officers, bars, restaurants and cultural venues, to attract people to visit.

- There had been plans for an event to take place in the City Centre, but it had to be cancelled due to the lockdown. Every effort would be made to look at organising events and releasing public outdoor spaces for use by performers, and it was hoped that a pilot could be undertaken using some of the £2 million funding. Any such events needed to be risk- assessed in terms of Covid-secure measures, and the Council would welcome any ideas for future events from groups or organisations.

6.10 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the information now reported and the responses to the questions raised; and
- (b) agrees to take no action in relation to the called-in decision, but requests that the Director of City Growth and the Interim Director of Sheffield Chamber of Commerce and Industry be invited to a future meeting in March/April 2021, to provide an update on the progress of the Sheffield Covid Business Response Group, including information on how resources from the Covid Relief Fund had been allocated to date.

7. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

7.1 The Committee received a report of the Policy and Improvement Officer (Deborah Glenn) containing the draft Work Programme for 2020/21.

7.2 Members made a number of suggestions in terms of possible issues it could scrutinise, which included small businesses and public transport.

7.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the information now reported; and
- (b) requests the Policy and Improvement Officer to contact First and Stagecoach bus operators and the Sheffield City Region, with the aim of inviting representatives from those organisations to the next meeting of the Committee, to be held 15th December 2020 to report on their future plans for a public transport network in the City.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 8.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Tuesday, 15th December 2020, at 4 30 pm.