

Agenda Item 9

Minutes of the Meeting of the Council of the City of Sheffield held on Wednesday 6 January 2021, at 2.00 pm, 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, and pursuant to notice duly given and Summonses duly served.

PRESENT

THE LORD MAYOR (Councillor Tony Downing)
THE DEPUTY LORD MAYOR (Councillor Gail Smith)

- | | | | | | |
|---|--|----|---|----|--|
| 1 | <i>Beauchief & Greenhill Ward</i>
Simon Clement-Jones
Bob Pullin
Richard Shaw | 10 | <i>East Ecclesfield Ward</i>
Andy Bainbridge
Vic Bowden
Moya O'Rourke | 19 | <i>Nether Edge & Sharrow Ward</i>
Peter Garbutt
Jim Steinke
Alison Teal |
| 2 | <i>Beighton Ward</i>
Bob McCann
Chris Rosling-Josephs
Sophie Wilson | 11 | <i>Ecclesall Ward</i>
Roger Davison
Barbara Masters
Shaffaq Mohammed | 20 | <i>Park & Arbourthorne</i>
Julie Dore
Ben Miskell
Jack Scott |
| 3 | <i>Birley Ward</i>
Denise Fox
Bryan Lodge
Karen McGowan | 12 | <i>Firth Park Ward</i>
Abdul Khayum
Alan Law
Abtisam Mohamed | 21 | <i>Richmond Ward</i>
Mike Drabble
Dianne Hurst |
| 4 | <i>Broomhill & Sharrow Vale Ward</i>
Angela Argenzio
Kaltum Rivers | 13 | <i>Fulwood Ward</i>
Sue Alston
Andrew Sangar
Cliff Woodcraft | 22 | <i>Shiregreen & Brightside Ward</i>
Dawn Dale
Peter Price
Garry Weatherall |
| 5 | <i>Burngreave Ward</i>
Jackie Drayton
Talib Hussain
Mark Jones | 14 | <i>Gleadless Valley Ward</i>
Lewis Dagnall
Cate McDonald
Paul Turpin | 23 | <i>Southey Ward</i>
Mike Chaplin
Tony Damms
Jayne Dunn |
| 6 | <i>City Ward</i>
Douglas Johnson
Ruth Mersereau
Martin Phipps | 15 | <i>Graves Park Ward</i>
Ian Auckland
Sue Auckland
Steve Ayris | 24 | <i>Stannington Ward</i>
David Baker
Penny Baker
Vickie Priestley |
| 7 | <i>Crookes & Crosspool Ward</i>
Tim Huggan
Mohammed Mahroof
Anne Murphy | 16 | <i>Hillsborough Ward</i>
Bob Johnson
George Lindars-Hammond
Josie Paszek | 25 | <i>Stocksbridge & Upper Don Ward</i>
Jack Clarkson
Julie Grocutt
Francyne Johnson |
| 8 | <i>Darnall Ward</i>
Mazher Iqbal
Mary Lea
Zahira Naz | 17 | <i>Manor Castle Ward</i>
Terry Fox
Sioned-Mair Richards | 26 | <i>Walkley Ward</i>
Ben Curran
Neale Gibson |
| 9 | <i>Dore & Totley Ward</i>
Joe Otten
Colin Ross
Martin Smith | 18 | <i>Mosborough Ward</i>
Tony Downing
Kevin Oxley
Gail Smith | 27 | <i>West Ecclesfield Ward</i>
Alan Hooper
Adam Hurst
Mike Lavery |
| | | | | 28 | <i>Woodhouse Ward</i>
Mick Rooney
Paul Wood |

1. MINUTE SILENCE - DEATH OF COUNCILLOR PETER RIPPON

- 1.1 The Lord Mayor (Councillor Tony Downing) reported with sadness, the death, on 20th December 2020, of Councillor Peter Rippon, who had served as a Member of the Council since 2003 and was Lord Mayor of Sheffield during the Municipal Year 2014/15.
- 1.2 Members of the Council observed a minute's silence in memory of their former colleague, and time was allocated at the end of the meeting for Members to pay tribute to him.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 2.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor Jackie Satur.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 3.1 There were no declarations of interest made by Members of the Council.

4. APPOINTMENT OF A NEW LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

4.1 Position of Leader of the Council

RESOLVED: On the motion of the Lord Mayor (Councillor Tony Downing), seconded by the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Gail Smith), that the Council notes the information contained in the report of the Director of Legal and Governance now submitted, in particular the resignation of Councillor Julie Dore as Leader of the Council with effect from 6th January 2021, and determines that a new Leader of the Council be appointed at this meeting, to serve for the remainder of the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

4.2 Appointment of a new Leader of the Council

RESOLVED: On the motion of Councillor Tony Damms, seconded by Councillor Dianne Hurst, that Councillor Bob Johnson be appointed Leader of the Council for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2020/21.

5. NOTIFICATION OF EXECUTIVE ARRANGEMENTS

- 5.1 The newly appointed Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Johnson) notified the Council of his arrangements for discharging the Executive functions of the Council. He reported that he was to appoint Councillor Julie Grocutt to serve as a Cabinet Member with effect from this day (6th January 2021), with responsibility for the Transport and Development Portfolio, and that the present

composition of the Cabinet, including the portfolio areas of responsibility, and existing scheme of delegation for the discharge of Executive functions, will continue unchanged.

5.2 The Council noted the information reported by the Leader of the Council.

6. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

Public Questions

6.1 The Lord Mayor (Councillor Tony Downing) invited eight members of the public to ask the questions which they had submitted prior to the published deadline for submission of petitions and questions for this meeting.

6.2 Public Question Concerning Leader and the Business Community

Martin McKervey, Chair of the Sheffield Property Association and Chair of the Castlegate Partnership referred to Councillor Julie Dore stepping down from the role of Leader of the Council. He spoke about Councillor Dore and to her working for and with the business community in Sheffield in a spirit of public and private sector partnership and collaboration. Mr McKervey also welcomed both Councillor Bob Johnson as the Leader of the Council and Kate Josephs, the Council's new Chief Executive.

He asked whether those present at this meeting of the Council would please join him in expressing the thanks and gratitude of the business community in Sheffield for everything that Councillor Dore had done to help and support business in the city.

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Johnson) responded and said that he recognised the work that had been done by Councillor Dore and Mr McKervey as part of the Local Enterprise Partnership and Transport for the North and which led to the development of HS3 (High Speed 3). Councillor Dore had also worked with the business community on the project to relocate HS2 and had also served as a member of the HS2 growth task force. She had also worked on other projects in partnership with the business community including the city centre regeneration, Heart of the City, World Snooker, supporting the devolution deal and economic projects such as the Olympic Legacy Park.

Councillor Johnson said that he would join with Mr McKervey in thanking Councillor Julie Dore for the work that she had done with businesses and much more. Councillor Johnson thanked Mr McKervey for attending the Council meeting to recognise that work.

6.3 Public Question Concerning Safe School Streets

Graham Turnbull made reference to a petition submitted to Council in December 2018 asking for Safe School Streets to be trialled in Sheffield. He said that there had been such a trial and he thanked the Council and those that had

worked on the schemes. He asked whether 2021 would be the year that safe school street schemes would be rolled out and how many schemes could be expected.

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Johnson) responded that the initial assessment of the ten schools in the safe school streets project had been completed and the aspiration was for the schemes to be delivered in 2021, notwithstanding any restrictions in the context of the pandemic and related difficulties. He explained that the schools were located across the city and schemes were individually tailored to suit a particular location.

He explained that the designs were currently undergoing a review to consider the feasibility and implications of various options. It was noteworthy that such schemes could only be implemented with the support of the schools and the local communities and would involve a great deal of consultation and planning prior to a scheme going ahead. He said that consultation was a key element and this had been affected by the circumstances of the pandemic and it was acknowledged that Council resources had also been stretched. However, it was the hope and aspiration that the schemes would be delivered in 2021.

6.4 Public Question Concerning Improving Local Democracy

Russell Johnson asked whether Councillor Johnson, as the Leader, would commit to implementing a modern committee system for the Council before the outcome of the referendum vote in May. He asked if the Leader would agree with him that this would enhance accountability and reduce the 'tribal' character of the Council in recent years, thus helping to rehabilitate Sheffield Labour in the eyes of the public.

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Johnson) stated that Councillor Terry Fox (the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Governance) and the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee had led on work relating to governance and the Big City Conversation had taken place. He said that he would be looking at the issues raised and including how the Council engaged with people, made decisions and was accountable. He said that he understood that there was a lot of consensus about what could be done and improvements that could be made. He said that Councillor Fox and others would take the work forward.

6.5 Public Questions Concerning Street Trees and Injunction Costs Monies

Russell Johnson asked whether the Leader of the Council would bravely seize the opportunity created by the regime change to initiate a meaningful process, without fear or favour, to uncover the whole truth about the 'Street Tree Scandal'.

Russell Johnson then asked whether the Council, under new leadership, would take the bold step of placing the Injunction Costs monies in a new tree planting fund to be focused on wards with a high level of deprivation. He said that he believed that such a move would go some way to redefining the Council's

position on peaceful protest against injustice, in keeping with fine Labour Party traditions.

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Johnson) stated that the Local Government Ombudsman had conducted an inquiry and the Forestry Commission had also done so. The Council had published a document entitled Review of Tree Investigations: Lessons Learned and Actions and which set out how the Council had learned lessons and the extensive work which had taken place over two and a half years to develop a new approach, including a new tree strategy developed jointly with partners, including STAG (Sheffield Tree Action Groups). The lessons learned document set out ten lessons learnt and fourteen actions that had been taken to improve future practice. An archive project had been set up to make sure all relevant information was in the public domain. Councillor Johnson said that if, having gone through the archive, there were any specific things that remained unanswered relating to this issue, he would be pleased to meet with Mr Johnson with regard to those matters.

(NOTE: Russell Johnson had submitted three questions for this meeting of the Council. The Lord Mayor explained that some of the content in question 3 was inaccurate and defamatory and therefore permission to ask the question, as submitted, would not be granted unless that content was withdrawn. Mr. Johnson agreed to withdraw the relevant content from his question.)

6.6 Public Question Concerning Council Housing Repairs

Sophie Thornton asked why Council housing repairs waiting times were so long in Sheffield when compared to the waiting times of other local authorities in Yorkshire?

Councillor Paul Wood (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety) said that emergency repairs were attended to within four hours if there was a major breakdown and it was classified as such. Urgent repairs were attended to within 24 hours. There was a 25 day timescale for normal repairs. However, some work in progress repairs did extend to 55 days. The time taken to do repairs had reduced in the past 12 months and he said that he hoped that would reduce further. There were some restrictions because of the Coronavirus pandemic and relating to safe working practices which had affected the service and some programmed work which had not been allowed previously during the first lockdown had subsequently been permitted to go ahead.

Councillor Wood explained that the Council undertook up to 10,000 repairs each month and sometimes a very small number of repairs were not completed to the level which was expected. New technical solutions were being deployed for the repairs service and he expected that would improve the time taken to complete repairs. Councillor Wood said that he apologised if people had waited for a repair. He also said that he would look at the details of individual cases if these were provided to him. He would also look at cases and concerns brought to his attention by all councillors.

6.7 Public Questions Concerning Streets Ahead Contract

Isabel O'Leary asked whether there were any unavoidable financial losses to the Council if Amey did not carry out the tree "felling programme" (as referred to in other legal communications to court) pursuant to Service Standard 6.38 or any other part of the Streets Ahead contract and if so, please could the relevant clause be specified.

Councillor Mark Jones (Cabinet Member for Environment, Streetscene and Climate Change) responded that he had asked Council officers to brief him on this specific issue and he would then provide a written answer to Isabel O'Leary.

6.8 Public Questions Concerning Streets Ahead

Justin Buxton asked the following 3 questions:

Why did the Leader of the Council specifically state, when asked by the presiding Judge, that she was "happy" with the Council's attempt to imprison residents pursuant to a civil injunction previously granted, when all the Council needed to do was implement an excusing clause to the Streets Ahead contract at no cost to the City?

What was the total net cost of all the legal action, evidence gathering and any other associated costs related in any way to all actions related in any way to the civil injunction Sheffield City Council obtained from Justice Males at Leeds Crown Court, including all subsequent committal proceedings; this would include any other associated costs related to each case, as mentioned above.

Mr Buxton said that the then Cabinet Member (Councillor Bryan Lodge) had previously stated on record that clause 19.1 of the Streets Ahead contract was effectively overridden by another clause(s) in the contract. He asked the Council to please specify and provide the clause(s) to which he was referring.

Councillor Mark Jones (Cabinet Member for Environment, Streetscene and Climate Change) stated that questions concerning court proceedings had been asked previously and answered by Councillor Julie Dore and he referred Mr Buxton to the answers previously given. He said that both he and Councillor Dore had continued to work with campaigners and other stakeholders to find solutions to issues regarding the retention of street trees. There was a new Street Tree Strategy which had been co-produced with partners and the Council was working to adopt learning and recommendations from the consultative process. He said that there were many challenges in seeking to retain and renew the tree stock and to preserve the public realm from which people could all benefit.

Councillor Jones said that in respect of the question regarding costs, he did not have this information at present and had asked for the information so that a written answer could be provided to Mr Buxton.

He said that with regard to the question concerning the particular clause of the Streets Ahead contract, he would provide a written answer to Mr Buxton. Councillor Jones suggested, because of the current restrictions relating to Coronavirus, that a remote meeting was arranged in future with Mr Buxton to discuss these matters.

(NOTE: Justin Buxton had submitted four questions for this meeting of the Council. The Lord Mayor explained that question 3 was not permissible under the Council Procedure Rules as it concerned a named former officer of the Council and that Mr. Buxton's other three questions would be permitted.)

6.9 Public Questions Concerning Proposed Crossing on Station Road in Halfway

Kurtis Crossland asked the following questions in relation to the proposed crossing on Station Road in Halfway:

1. When will the feasibility study take place?
2. Will the results of the study be made public? If so, when?
3. Will the incoming Cabinet Member support the campaign for the crossing?

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Johnson) stated that officers were in the process of evaluating the potential for a crossing on Station Road and that work was ongoing. He said that he had asked for the results of that study to be made available to him by the end of January. Whilst this was not usually information that would be published, a decision could be made regarding that and, if there was public interest, the information could be disseminated by local Councillors and the Member of Parliament. He said that the new Cabinet Member would work with the Cabinet and decisions were made collectively. He reassured Mr Crossland that he would be made aware of the decision, together with other local people.

6.10 Public Questions Concerning Conduct

Ruth Hubbard stated that at November's full Council meeting, the former Leader responded to a member of the public presenting a petition about free school meals and asking for greater collaboration by delivering an extraordinary attack on that member of the public. She said that the Leader was egged on by at least one other member of the ruling group and that whilst this was not the first time the Leader was rude or, in her view, aggressive in responding to members of the public, the attempt to belittle and humiliate this member of the public was particularly nasty and bullying. She said that to be clear, and to ensure that councillors were aware of the impact of such behaviour, she would say that many members of the public were nervous before asking questions because the Leader was known for responding in a hostile way. She said that as a result, the Ante Room at the Town Hall before full Council, where public questioners are asked to gather, was frequently something of a support group for members of the public, sometimes attending the Town Hall for the first time. Ruth Hubbard said that in November's full Council, the Leader was called out by two

other public questioners for her behaviour. She asked what action the Monitoring Officer or others, took following the November full Council meeting in response to this bullying incident?

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Johnson) said that he would welcome questions and petitions and that members of the public should be encouraged to ask questions and hold elected representatives to account. Public questions were one way of seeing local democracy in action and were an opportunity for legitimate public concern and should be free of political opportunism.

He referred to the Council's commitment to provide free school meals to children in Sheffield over half term and for the Christmas holidays and to a petition submitted to Council relating to free school meals. Councillor Johnson expressed concerns about the use of public questions and petitions for party political reasons. He said that complaints about the behaviour of Members were dealt with by the Standards complaints process and the information relating to complaints was personal and treated in confidence. Standards fell within the remit of the Audit and Standards Committee and a report was produced annually summarising the number and outcome of complaints.

6.11 Public Questions Concerning Streets Ahead

Ruth Hubbard stated that in recent months the former Leader ruled out a public inquiry into 'the street trees scandal' in Sheffield. She asked, given that the former Leader was likely, herself, to be a main subject of the inquiry, how is it possible that the decision on this could be made by her given the clear conflict of interest involved, how has this been dealt with? Ruth Hubbard said that she noted that the Monitoring Officer who might normally step in to deal with this clear conflict of interest was likely also to be a key subject for an inquiry.

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Johnson) responded that lawfully, a decision to embark on a public inquiry was one for the Council's executive to make, taking into consideration whether the public interests would outweigh the potential costs. The Leader, as the Chair of the Council's executive, had been clear that the Council had apologised and had taken steps to remedy any mistakes made.

6.12 Public Questions Concerning Written Responses to Questions

Ruth Hubbard stated that one of the key reasons members of the public ask full questions at full Council was in order to ensure there was a public record of answers given. She said that frequently people are told they will be responded to in writing. Also frequently, members of the public return to say they had not received an answer in writing. She said that she had often been told she will receive an answer in writing but didn't think she had ever received such a letter. She asked whether the Council would consider a follow up mechanism to ensure that where written replies are committed to that these were completed, and – in the absence of other reasons why information should remain confidential - will the Council ensure that these answers were made public in

Council minutes given that the reason for asking was precisely to ensure they are made on public record.

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Johnson) explained that a schedule of questions and petitions received from members of the public and answers provided by Cabinet Members was now published on the Council's website with documents for each of the Council meetings. The schedule indicated whether a response was made at the meeting and was recorded in the minutes or that a written response was provided and a copy of that response was included in the schedule. There was a schedule of questions, petitions and responses for the Council meetings in March, October, November and December 2020.

Councillor Johnson said that there was also a follow-up mechanism now in place to help make sure that members of the public do receive those answers in writing when promised and where appropriate. He said that anybody not receiving a written response could contact him and he would make sure that happened.

7. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

7.1 Urgent Business

- 7.1.1 With the permission of the Lord Mayor (Councillor Tony Downing), Councillors Sioned-Mair Richards and Angela Argenzio asked the following questions relating to urgent business, under the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 16.6(ii):-

Councillor Richards – “With the recent closure of schools, there were concerns, certainly within my Ward, about the digital divide and the lack of digital connectivity, as well as hardware, for all the school students who are now having to learn from home, and wished to ask what the Council was doing to ensure that students have access to the hardware but also to connectivity when so many parents are operating on pay as you go contracts or do not have access to wi-fi / broadband services at all?”

Councillor Argenzio – “Following the closure of schools on Tuesday, has Sheffield Council undertaken an audit to ensure that all children entitled to support are being provided with laptops, tablets and internet connections to help children and families access remote education? If not, what action will they be taking to ensure children from disadvantaged backgrounds aren't disproportionately affected by the latest closure?”

- 7.1.2 In response, Councillor Abtisam Mohamed (the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) thanked the questioners for their timely questions given the recent announcement that schools were to close and move to remote learning with immediate effect. She stated that the Council did recognise the issues raised by the questioners and she agreed that learning online was not just about access to hardware but was also about connectivity and digital inclusion and she recognised that there were many families struggling to ensure their children

have adequate access to remote learning because of either lack of connectivity or because siblings were having to share devices. She referred to the Government's offer of laptops to schools, but commented that this initiative had been extremely slow to get up and running, with many schools having complained about the length of time taken between requesting and receiving the devices, and she added that this situation was not good enough, leaving students with inequitable access. She stated that the Council believed that there should be equitable access for all students and was working hard to address this issue as quickly as possible with the aim of ensuring that children from disadvantaged backgrounds were not disproportionately impacted by the closure of schools. Working with colleagues from Learn Sheffield, an audit of schools was to be undertaken within the next few days to establish what the current demand is in terms of unmet need, and the Council will be working, along with the city's business sector and the campaign Laptops For Kids, to meet the hardware and connectivity needs as soon as possible, once this has been established by the audit.

- 7.1.3 In response to a supplementary question, permitted by the Lord Mayor, from Councillor Argenzio, Councillor Mohamed stated that schools had undertaken audits earlier in the school year based on their previous method of operation whereby pupil bubbles would be asked to learn from home for short periods of time, whereas this latest audit was being conducted on the basis of full closure of all schools.

7.2 South Yorkshire Joint Authorities

- 7.2.1 Questions under the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 16.6(i), relating to the discharge of the functions of the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority, were asked by Councillor Martin Phipps as follows:-

“Residents of North Bank flats were evacuated shortly before Christmas after a fire service inspection which deemed the flats not fit to live in. Why did it take so long for North Bank's fire safety issues to be treated so seriously? Issues to do with North Bank were known for years before.”

“Are we confident that other flats in Sheffield with similar known fire safety issues, such as cladding, are fit for human habitation? How can we be sure, given the time it took to declare North Bank unfit for humans, that those flats are fit for human habitation? How are flats with known fire safety issues in Sheffield being supported?”

- 7.2.2 Councillor Tony Damms, the Council's Spokesperson on the Fire and Rescue Authority, responded by stating that he would arrange for a detailed written response to be supplied by the Chief Fire Officer. He stated, however, that the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority had a duty to inspect certain types of buildings, of which there were 180 such buildings in Sheffield. He added that thorough inspections were being carried out as quickly as possible by the Fire Service and that he had recently been made aware that 59 of the 180 buildings had been inspected.

8. CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) UPDATE

- 8.1 Greg Fell, the Director of Public Health, provided an update on the latest position in relation to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, including the latest epidemiology and key metrics. He explained that, in the past year, mobility of the population had reduced and markedly so during periods of lockdown including walking, driving and public transport, although the disease continued to circulate. The 7 day incidence of Covid-19 was high and rising. Transmission of Covid-19 was still principally between households. Incidence of Covid-19 was lowest in the younger population and growth was being driven by the working age population. The rate of positivity of those tested was 9.7 percent. A significant proportion of Sheffield Teaching Hospital beds had a patient with Covid-19 and the situation remained very difficult to manage. The new variant of the disease was much more transmissible, although the mitigation measures were the same. The fundamentals remained the same, namely people getting tested if they had symptoms, contact tracing and isolation, together with reducing social contact, hand washing, wearing face coverings and social distancing; and supporting individuals and businesses.
- 8.2 Mr Fell said that the effect of restrictions upon rates of infection depended on people's behaviour and it was acknowledged that there were also harmful social and economic consequences associated with the actions taken to tackle the virus. In regard to vaccinations, things were developing quickly and that many thousands of people had now received the first dose of the vaccine.
- 8.3 Greg Fell's presentation was followed by an opportunity for Members of the Council to ask questions and a summary of the questions and responses was as follows:
- 8.4 Questions were asked about the decision to write to schools telling them to open and whether that was now considered to be the right decision; and as to whether teachers and other staff in schools should be vaccinated as a priority. Mr Fell responded that there was very little in-school transmission associated with the way in which schools were run and he praised schools for the work they had done to manage risk. However, any environment which brought people together carried a risk of transmission of the virus. Importantly, children received an education in school. He said that the case rate was lowest in school age children and there was local data to support that.
- 8.5 The decision regarding schools was a matter for the Department of Education and government. The City was very mindful of clusters, cases, and the importance of management of bubbles in schools and the schools had done a good job in relation to comprehensive risk assessments and working to a Covid-secure standard, although as in any context, this did not imply absolute safety.
- 8.6 He said that from an epidemiological perspective, there was a valid case that schools being open placed an upward pressure on the reproduction number (R). Nonetheless, taking into account the negative effect of schools being closed,

such as missed education, loss of life chances and life opportunities, his recommendations to the Council was that it should support schools to open. Importantly, it was not the Council's decision as to whether schools should open or not. SAGE (Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies) had never called for schools to close, although it had made the point that if schools were open, it would be difficult to keep the R number on or below 1.

- 8.7 Greg Fell explained that on Sunday 3 January, he advised the Cabinet that he believed the Council should support schools to be open. However, he had not anticipated the change in government policy on Monday 4 January when the Prime Minister put the country into lockdown. Schools were open for children of key workers and vulnerable children. He said that it was a difficult, very complex and fast-moving situation and he would stand by the advice he provided to Cabinet.
- 8.8 He said that on the question of vaccinations, government policy was based largely on age and with one occupational category which was health and social care and care home care workers. A change to that policy would be a national policy issue and people were vaccinated according to the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation priority list. He would make available further information on the rationale relating to the order of vaccination.
- 8.9 In response to a question concerning the effect of poor air quality on Covid-19, including incidence, deaths and long-Covid and evidence in relation to Sheffield with regard to hospitalisation and death, there was national evidence that in areas of poor air quality, there was a higher instance of hospitalisation, admission to intensive care and early death. Areas of poorer air quality also tended to be more deprived places and there may be other factors to consider. There was however hypothetical and theoretical evidence to say that poor air quality, whilst it might not be a causal factor in Covid-19 outcomes, was not helpful and the City continued to do what it could to improve air quality. However, local research had not been done on this issue.
- 8.10 Questions were asked about changes to the number of doses of the vaccine that people would receive, the lateness of the changes and that some people were receiving two doses whilst others had the appointment for their second dose cancelled, and with regard to concerns about whether a single dose was effective.
- 8.11 Greg Fell responded that two doses would be given of either the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine or the Astra-Zeneca vaccine. The change in policy was based on the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation recommendations to Chief Medical Officers and which was accepted and in turn recommended to the Government and it became policy. The change concerned the space between the two doses and the recommendation now was for a 12 week period between doses. Nonetheless, everyone should still receive two doses. Mr Fell explained the rationale which was to provide more people with covering immunity in a limited period of time by providing them with a single dose. The limiting factors included the availability of the vaccine and the availability of clinicians to administer it. The original studies were done on the

basis of the doses being given relatively close together. He went on to explain the basis of the science behind the recommendation and policy and said that it was partly a matter of trust in the Joint Committee and the science.

- 8.12 He said that it was a difficult situation, because there were thousands of people who had received the first dose of the Pfizer vaccine and expected to receive a second dose and had consented to do so, whilst national policy was that those appointments should be cancelled to enable more people to receive a first dose. It was also problematic for local GPs who were managing the situation as well as they could and making clinical judgments on a patient by patient basis.
- 8.13 He said that the vaccination programme was one delivered by the NHS. There would be a citywide vaccination programme delivery board established, comprising the Council, principally for logistical support, and the clinical input of the NHS to achieve the shared aim of vaccinating people as quickly as possible. Mr Fell remarked on the considerable effort by the NHS in terms of the roll out of the vaccination programme.
- 8.14 Questions were raised about balancing the effort required in respect of the vaccination programme with other interventions such as test, trace and isolate and as to how much control it was anticipated that Sheffield would have over how measures to tackle the virus were implemented. A further question was asked about asymptomatic infections and lateral flow tests and as to whether there would be mass testing. Thirdly, a question was put about NHS volunteer responders and registrations from people in Sheffield; how many requests had been taken up; and with regard to the number of people undertaking specific roles.
- 8.15 Greg Fell responded that he did not have information about volunteer responders and would endeavour to find that information out so that it could be published. As regards asymptomatic infections and mass testing, there were several schemes using lateral flow devices. However, there was not capacity to implement and coordinate such schemes into a coherent whole. There was some lateral flow testing, for instance to enable care home visiting, and care homes had identified the difficulties in administering such schemes because of the resources required. At the moment, he did not anticipate implementing mass testing in the way it was made operational in the Liverpool pilot, nor was he aware of evidence that such an approach made a difference, only that it was operationally possible.
- 8.16 Testing of those who had symptoms using a rapid test and then contact tracing and isolation made a significant difference. Although asymptomatic testing might add some value, the cost in terms of necessary resources was high. Liverpool had initially used 2,000 troops to implement the testing programme.
- 8.17 He explained that asymptomatic testing was an imperfect test and false negatives were a key concern and in the order of 40 percent of test results would be false negative. That may have consequences for the way people behaved, having received a negative test and which was false.

- 8.18 In terms of current epidemiology, the COVID-19 prevalence was 2 percent. Of those, 70 percent had symptoms and 30 percent were asymptomatic. That 30 percent comprised a mix of truly asymptomatic; those with symptoms and who had not noticed the fact; or those who were pre-symptomatic. The science regarding asymptomatic testing and lateral flow devices was valid in relation to very niche areas and very defined target cohorts, such as testing of contacts of cases and to minimise isolation periods which would be appropriate and would provide definite benefits. However, the science did not support mass testing of whole populations.
- 8.19 In relation to the question concerning the balance of national and local control, Mr Fell said that the response was appropriately a national one as it was a national pandemic. There had been some shift towards local control. There were areas such as contact tracing, that he would wish were within local control. The local contact tracing was performing well and the completion rates and the proportion of cases of contacts that were found, contacted, and given advice, was in the order of 80 percent, as compared to 50 percent for national test and trace. He wanted to do that a lot quicker but required the resources to do so.
- 8.20 Questions were asked about the extent to which there might be further restrictions next winter, as indicated recently by the Chief Medical Officer; secondly, whether the vaccine would become an annual one akin to the flu vaccine; and thirdly, whether Covid-19 was just bad influenza.
- 8.21 Mr Fell responded that Covid-19 was definitely not a bad flu. He explained that the case fatality rate i.e. the proportion of people that had flu and who then die, was in the order of 0.1, whereas it was a fatality rate of 1 percent for Covid-19, which was significant and particularly in the context of how easily the virus was spread. Severe illness from Covid-19 was significantly worse than illness from flu and people were more likely to die. There was also the cluster of syndromes known as long-Covid, which often had no bearing to the severity of the initial infection. Covid was much more severe and more serious than flu.
- 8.21 Most Coronaviruses were seasonal and this was the case for Covid-19, which was a Coronavirus. There may be other virological reasons but principally, people spent more time indoors during winter and the risk of transmission was higher indoors and particularly in places and touch points that were not cleaned regularly, such as in our homes. People tended to be closer to each other indoors and not as Covid-secure and there was less ventilation.
- 8.22 Mr Fell said that as regards next winter, whilst it might be too far away to predict, it was likely and he hoped that, the population would be fairly well vaccinated by next winter. Covid-19 would still exist and will not have been eradicated. There might be some degree of measures in place, including handwashing, distancing, and wearing of face coverings. He was not in a position to say whether there would be other restrictions.
- 8.23 Current thinking was that the Covid vaccine was a two dose and one off vaccine and not an annual measure. However, it was not known how long immunity would last because the studies had not gone on for long enough and

Coronaviruses may mutate. Currently, the vaccine was effective against the identified mutated strain.

- 8.24 In response to a question about what the local authority could do to ensure that people were vaccinated as quickly as possible, Greg Fell stated that activity would include communications and myth-busting and the Council's role in community leadership. This was particularly as the AstraZeneca vaccine was implemented because it was much easier to handle so the vaccination programme could be accelerated. The clinical element of the programme was the role of the NHS. The Council had a role in relation to communications, building confidence and addressing people's legitimate concerns about safety. It also had a role with regard to logistics support as well to enable the NHS to deliver the vaccination programme as quickly as possible. For example, that might include the use of marquees outside primary care centres to enable people to queue under shelter.
- 8.25 A question was asked about the fatality rate, the age profile of those in hospital and vaccination priority for those people in hospital when they had recovered. Mr Fell said that there were approximately 300 people in Sheffield hospitals with Covid-19 and they were mostly over 60. The 1 percent fatality rate was referring to the proportion of all people who developed symptoms that would die. The fatality rate was higher in hospitals. However, the risk of death had significantly reduced because of two things. Firstly, NHS intensive care clinical practice had changed so that intensive care clinicians used the prone position, turning patients on to their front to help their breathing and that had definitely had an impact on reducing hospital mortality. Secondly, was the use of a drug Dexamethasone, which had massively reduced mortality. Many people now in hospital would not have survived in the first wave but they were now surviving with complex illness for longer and they were in hospital for longer.
- 8.26 He said that he was fairly certain and would seek clarity on the point that, even if a person had had Covid-19, the recommendation was that they should still be vaccinated and that would be addressed at the point of the individual consenting for the vaccine.
- 8.27 A question was asked about plans and agreements and support that was in place with the City's two universities in relation to students returning to Sheffield and how might they advise students in that regard. Greg Fell explained that the Council provided regular input and advice to the two universities on interpreting national policy and in relation to Covid-secure campuses, teaching and learning environments and accommodation. There was also support to help the universities manage cases and clusters as they occurred, as had been the case throughout the pandemic. The universities were independent institutions with policy responsibilities to the Department of Education. The Government Minister of State for Universities, Michelle Donelan MP, wrote to universities before the lockdown and advised them that they should not start routine face-to-face teaching other than for courses where it was very difficult to do otherwise, such as for nurses and doctors, health professionals and teacher training. He believed that both universities were offering online teaching as the default for most types of courses but with some exceptions.

- 8.28 He said that even in circumstances where students had travelled back to university, the vast majority of people did not have the illness, although it was critically important that when people developed symptoms they were managed appropriately and the individual concerned needed to get rapidly tested and to isolate.
- 8.29 Greg Fell said that both universities had managed the situation well. There had been a big spike in cases in Sheffield at the start of the September university term, as occurred in all university cities and which was principally in 18 to 24 year olds but that had not bled into the general population as might have been feared. If 18 to 24 year olds were removed from the data in Sheffield, its epidemic curve was the same as every other place in South Yorkshire. Whilst he did have concerns, the reality was that some face-to-face teaching was necessary and the universities had practical systems to manage the situation.
- 8.30 Questions were asked about immunity following someone having had and recovered from Covid-19 and having received two vaccinations for the virus; and whether people that had received a vaccination could go out and mix with others. Mr Fell said that people would be breaking the law if they mixed with others outside of the restrictions that were in place. The recommendation would be that having had a vaccination, an individual should wait for 10 to 15 days whilst the antibody response developed. However, even then people could carry the virus on their hands and it was not known whether or not being vaccinated reduced transmission. It was known that it reduced the risk of death and people may have milder illness but could still be infectious to others.
- 8.31 Questions were asked about whether the universities were carrying out lateral flow tests with returning students and with regard to the provision of teaching and learning in the context of lockdown and restrictions. Greg Fell said that, whilst he did not know the precise nature of the teaching offer at the two universities, both the universities and students placed a high value on face-to-face teaching and the Vice Chancellors had been clear that in terms of the mental well-being of students, face to face contact was really important. However, at present that was not an option for significant numbers of courses. His role and that of the Public Health team in relation to the universities concentrated on Public Health support, rather than the teaching and learning offer.
- 8.32 With regards lateral flow testing, it was notable that at the end of the last term, the two universities tested approximately ten thousand students and found about 12 cases of Covid-19 and there had been a similar ratio across the university sector. Whilst lateral flow testing involved a large commitment of resources for what appeared to be little benefit, the universities would continue to undertake the tests and the Government had mandated them to do so.
- 8.33 A question was asked about early years provision and whether it was safe for early years providers to remain open to parents of non-key workers and non-vulnerable children and what was being done to support the early years sector.

- 8.34 Greg Fell said that not as much had been done in relation to the early years sector as it had in relation to schools and he had not been aware of concerns among early years professionals about a lack of guidance and he would address that issue. He said that it might be the case that work had already been done in that regard.
- 8.35 Standard operating protocols had been developed for how cases of Covid-19 in the early years sector were managed, as they had been for schools. He said that he would check the level of coverage of that guidance in the early years sector. Regular updates had been provided to the sector, although there was probably more that could be done. With regard to opening of early years provision and safety, the early years sector was likely to be no more or less safe than schools and this was subject to national policy decisions. He said that he was not clear about why it was that early years provision remained open to all, whilst the schools did not.
- 8.36 A question was asked about the new variant and as to the adequacy of guidelines and measures which remained the same despite the new variant being significantly more transmissible. Greg Fell explained that the mitigations and the behaviours of individuals required to reduce the risk of transmission were the same in relation to the new variant as for Covid-19 more generally (i.e. to wash hands, wear face coverings, keep distance and limit social contact). He said that the problem was with implementation and adherence to the guidelines, rather than the guidelines themselves not being appropriate. He could provide a recent paper that had been produced and that was relevant to this. He was not aware of any fundamental change to the guidance and whilst he might accept that the approach should be toughened up, that would be in relation to implementation of measures and adherence to the measures.
- 8.37 A question was asked about the common areas in hospitals, such as accident and emergency and outpatient areas and as to work that had been done in relation to infections in hospital settings. Mr Fell responded that he would request a written answer from the NHS to address the question.
- 8.38 A question was asked about the situation with regard the vaccine for patients that used an EpiPen and who had been turned away because they had allergies.
- 8.39 A further question was asked concerning the welfare of people who had been instructed to isolate or were shielding and remained in their homes and were having financial difficulty and whether any consideration had been given to provide a winter fuel allowance to those people on lower incomes.
- 8.40 Greg Fell responded that he would ask for an answer to the question concerning EpiPens as it was a detailed clinical policy question for the NHS.
- 8.41 He said that the Council had arrangements in place with regard to community hubs and the helpline to support people. He did not know whether there had been discussion about additional winter-fuel payments for those who were shielding and he would provide a response to the question.

- 8.42 The Council noted the information reported and thanked Greg Fell for attending the meeting and providing the update and for answering Members' questions.

9. REVIEW OF THE MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT AND COUNCILLOR COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

- 9.1 RESOLVED: On the motion of Councillor Sioned-Mair Richards, seconded by Councillor Simon Clement-Jones, that this Council adopts the proposed changes to the Members' Code of Conduct and the Procedure for Dealing with Complaints regarding City, Parish and Town Councillors and Co-Opted Members, as set out in the report of the Director of Legal and Governance now submitted.

- 9.1.1 (NOTE: 1. Councillors Angela Argenzio, Kaltum Rivers, Douglas Johnson, Ruth Mersereau, Martin Phipps, Paul Turpin, Peter Garbutt and Alison Teal abstained from voting on the Motion, and asked for this to be recorded; and

2. Prior to the passing of the resolution, a proposed amendment to the Motion, moved at the meeting by Councillor Alison Teal, was rejected by the Lord Mayor (Councillor Tony Downing) on the grounds that the proposed amendment had not been submitted in writing to the Chief Executive by 12 noon on the day preceding the meeting, as required by Council Procedure Rule 12.1.)

10. APPOINTMENT TO THE POST OF INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PLACE

- 10.1 RESOLVED: On the motion of Councillor Bob Johnson, seconded by Councillor Mary Lea, that this Council notes the information contained in the report of the Director of Human Resources and Customer Services now submitted, informing the Council of the recent appointment of Mick Crofts to the post of Interim Executive Director of Place, and that Mr. Crofts will take up his new role on 6th January 2021.

11. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS COUNCIL MEETING

- 11.1 RESOLVED: On the motion of Councillor Tony Damms, seconded by Councillor Garry Weatherall, that the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 2nd December 2020 be approved as a true and accurate record.

12. REPRESENTATION, DELEGATED AUTHORITY AND RELATED ISSUES

- 12.1 RESOLVED: On the motion of Councillor Dianne Hurst, seconded by Councillor Tony Damms, that:-

(a) approval be given to the following changes to the memberships of Committees, Boards, etc.:-

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|---|--|
| Senior Officer Employment Committee | - Remove Councillor Julie Dore, creating a vacancy and to appoint Councillor Bob Johnson as Chair of the Committee |
| Appeals and Collective Disputes Committee | - Councillor Garry Weatherall to fill a vacancy |
| Corporate Joint Committee with Trade Unions | - Remove Councillor Julie Dore, creating a vacancy |
| Corporate Members Group | - Councillor Bob Johnson to replace Councillor Julie Dore, and Councillor Tony Damms to fill a vacancy |
| Local Area Partnership Lead Ward Member for Manor Castle Ward | - Councillor Sioned-Mair Richards to fill a vacancy |
| Place Portfolio Joint Consultative Committee | - Remove Councillor Bob Johnson, creating a vacancy |

(b) representatives be appointed to serve on other bodies as follows:-

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|--|--|
| Sheffield City Region Combined Authority | - Councillor Bob Johnson to replace Councillor Julie Dore, and Councillor Terry Fox to replace Councillor Bob Johnson as the rotational Member |
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Sheffield City Region Combined Authority Executive Boards (*1 Member, plus 1 Reserve*):-

- | | |
|---|---|
| Business Recovery and Growth Board | - Councillor Bob Johnson to replace Councillor Julie Dore as the Reserve Member |
| Education, Skills and Employability Board | - Councillor Bob Johnson to replace Councillor Julie Dore as the Reserve Member |
| Housing and Infrastructure Board | - Councillor Bob Johnson to replace Councillor Julie Dore as chair of the Board |
| Church Burgesses Trust Charity | - Councillor Garry Weatherall to fill a vacancy |

Great Places: Sheffield Housing Board	- Councillor Sioned-Mair Richards to fill a vacancy
River Stewardship Company	- Councillor Garry Weatherall to replace Councillor Andy Bainbridge
Sheffield Business Adviser Panel	- Councillor Bob Johnson to replace Councillor Julie Dore
Sheffield City Region Local Enterprise Partnership	- Councillor Bob Johnson to replace Councillor Julie Dore
Sheffield Partnership Board	- Councillor Bob Johnson to replace Councillor Julie Dore
South Yorkshire Leaders' Group	- Councillor Bob Johnson to replace Councillor Julie Dore
Southey/Owlerton Area Regeneration Board	- Councillor Garry Weatherall to replace Councillor Moya O'Rourke

- (c) it be noted that the Senior Officer Employment Sub-Committee, at its meeting held on 26th November 2020, appointed Laura Wileman to the post of Head of Communications within the Chief Executive's Portfolio and that Ms. Wileman is expected to start in post on 26th January 2021; and
- (d) it be noted that the Senior Officer Employment Sub-Committee, at its meeting held on 4th December 2020, appointed Andrew Jones (the Interim Director) to the post of Director of Education and Skills within the People Services Portfolio.

13. TRIBUTES TO COUNCILLOR PETER RIPPON

- 13.1 The Lord Mayor (Councillor Tony Downing) provided an opportunity for Members of the Council to pay tribute to Councillor Peter Rippon, who sadly had died on 20th December 2020.
- 13.2 Councillor Rippon had served as a Member of the Council since 2003, representing the Shiregreen and Brightside Ward and, more recently, the Richmond Ward. He was the Lord Mayor of Sheffield during the Municipal Year 2014/15 and, for the past five years, was a Co-Chair of the Planning and Highways Committee.
- 13.3 Several Members of the Council spoke to pay tribute to him.