

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Meeting held 17 December 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 Mick Rooney (Chair), Ian Auckland, Steve Ayriss, Denise Fox, Julie Grocutt, Tim Huggan, Douglas Johnson, Mike Levery, Cate McDonald, Sioned-Mair Richards and Jim Steinke

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor Ben Curran.

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 There were no declarations of interest.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

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

5. SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL - UPDATE ON THE END OF THE EU TRANSITION

5.1 The Committee received a report of the Director of Policy, Performance and Communications providing an update on the latest assessment of Brexit and the impending end of the EU transition period on Sheffield and the City Council.

5.2 Present for this item were James Henderson (Director of Policy, Performance and Communications) and Catherine Pritchard (Policy and Improvement Officer).

5.3 James Henderson presented the report, stressing initially that it would be difficult to provide any clarity on the impact of the transition on Sheffield and the City Council on the basis that a trade deal had not yet been agreed. He stated that with the impending end of EU transition, the Council had reformed its internal Brexit Working Group to respond to, and mitigate, as far as possible, any identified risks. Such risks and impacts were detailed in the Impact Assessment appended to the report.

- 5.4 Mr Henderson made reference to the impact of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, due mainly to the pressures the pandemic had placed on services, people and the economy during 2020. He reported on the work being undertaken at a South Yorkshire level, through the Local Resilience Forum, and a separate Local Resilience Forum EU transition cell, which met weekly to ensure all the Council's partners throughout the region were working together, and co-ordinating mitigations and preparations.
- 5.5 Mr Henderson referred to the work undertaken to date in connection with the two highest impact areas - business and communities. He highlighted the particular difficulties which had been faced by businesses, due to Covid-19, during 2020, which had already stretched the resilience of many of them, and resulted in the fact that the EU transition arrangements had not represented their main focus, resulting in many businesses not being adequately prepared. In terms of community impact, he referred to the potential for short-term disruption to food and fuel supplies, particularly more so if a trade deal was not agreed. Mr Henderson also highlighted the need for European citizens to apply for settled status by the deadline of June 2021, and referred to the work being undertaken by the Council in helping and supporting EU nationals in Sheffield to apply for such status.
- 5.6 Members of the Committee raised questions, and the following responses were provided:-
- Government funding had been provided for the Council and the Sheffield City Region (SCR) for the appointment of two posts of International Trade Advisor, whose role it was to provide support and advice to key manufacturing companies. It was accepted that such companies would require more support with regard to customs declarations, and it was hoped that more specialist support could be provided to such companies after 1st January 2021.
 - Every effort would be made to ensure that Town and Parish Councils would be provided with as much information and advice as possible, although this would mainly comprise signposting to the current Government information/advice.
 - The issue of relevant support being provided to businesses after 1st January 2021, had been discussed in detail at meetings of the Internal Brexit Working Group, and there was relevant funding available to enable support to be provided after this date.
 - The Council was supporting all staff who were EU citizens to ensure they applied for EU settled status prior to the June 2021 deadline.
 - The issue of conformity of teaching qualifications was not something the Council had much control over, therefore was dependent on Government rules on this. Checks would be made of the Council's Director of Education and Skills to see if schools were aware of these requirements.
 - There had been a considerable level of Government publicity and

communications regarding the need for those EU nationals resident in the UK, who had not already done so, to apply for EU settled status. Whilst the Council had undertaken some work in this regard, it was acknowledged that there was a need for further work. Any assistance from Councillors in terms of highlighting these requirements in their Wards would be helpful and welcome.

- The Council had received £315,000 EU transition funding from the Government, and the SCR had received around £65,000 for the work required in preparation for Brexit. The Council had been cautious in terms of the spending of its allocation, mainly due to the lack of clarity in terms of a possible No Deal. The majority of the funding had been earmarked for providing support and advice for businesses after 1st January 2021, or for providing assistance to food banks, if required.
- There were not just concerns for those businesses who will be directly importing and exporting, but also those businesses in broader supply chains. Those businesses directly importing and exporting would initially be at the forefront of the discussions, to ensure they have got their customs declarations and other necessary regulatory approvals in place, even in the event that a trade deal was not agreed as there would still be non-tariff barriers associated with this.
- Officers had been working closely with colleagues in the Community Services Team on the issue of EU settled status, although it was acknowledged that further work was required on this issue between now and the deadline of June 2021. As this was a Government scheme, it was difficult to know how many people either hadn't applied under the scheme, or had applied, and had been rejected. Those who do not apply by the deadline would no longer have the right of residency in the UK and, although the Government's intentions remain unclear in this matter, there was a possibility that they could be removed from the UK. It was similarly unclear what the Government's stance would be in the case of families where the child was born in the UK, thereby having British citizenship, but their parents were EU nationals and had not made a successful application for EU settled status.
- It was not believed that there would be any adverse implications for Veolia or Amey in terms of the EU transition arrangements as their operations in the city were run through UK companies.
- There were no statistics regarding the impact of the uncertainty of the arrangements on businesses, although there was evidence of this following conversations held by Council officers with the businesses. It was acknowledged that businesses had a very short time period to prepare for any changes prior to 1st January 2021, a problem exacerbated due to the Christmas Holidays and the impact of Covid-19. This meant that businesses' capacity to react and deal with the issues was very limited, therefore the expected preparedness of businesses was not as high as the Council would have wanted.

- Whilst there hadn't been any work undertaken regarding tenant farmers or with regard to possible issues at Graves Park Animal Farm, it was not anticipated that there would be any early adverse impact on tenant farmers. The Council would give consideration to providing support and advice for such farmers in the city.
- SCR had undertaken considerable work on business surveillance, and had an effective economic surveillance function. It had undertaken work around Brexit, which the Council had access to as part of its decision-making processes.
- Trading Standards was very much part of the Council's internal EU transition works arrangements. Discussions had been held with the Environmental and Regulatory Services Manager with regard to Trading Standards, and his staff had been undertaking a considerable level of liaison across the Trading Standards Officer network to ensure they were as prepared as they could be. Consideration was being given to putting additional funding resources into this area to support additional workload for Trading Standards caused by the end of the transition period.
- Officers would be planning to consider the issue of careers advice in schools, and this issue would be raised with the Director of Education and Skills in order to get an understanding of what needed to change in terms of such advice.
- Work had been undertaken by the Council's Commercial Services Team to ensure that Council supplies were prepared for changes brought about as a result of EU transition. The Council's Contracts Standing Orders would remain in place, regardless of the UK's status in relation to the EU, therefore the Council's approach to tendering would continue to be as rigorous as it always has been. Therefore, it was not expected that there would be any significant changes regarding the Council's tendering and procurement management arrangements.
- Specific issues for local e-commerce businesses would be picked up through the business support that was being provided to businesses.
- As part of the Government's threat and risk assessment, local capacity and capability is significantly lower than at the same time last year due to the concurrence of Covid-19. Some of the Council's capacity, which would be used to deal with the EU transition arrangements, had been lost as officers were dealing with Covid. However, there were arrangements in place, and staff were continuing to work through the risks and mitigations. The Council would continue to ensure, as far as possible, that there was sufficient capacity to work on both the response to Covid-19 and the EU transition arrangements.
- The Council was working closely with the food banks in the city to understand how the use of such banks may change after 1st January 2021, and to ensure that the banks were able to respond to any increased demand for

their services.

- The Government's view was that there would not be overall problems in terms of food supply, but there could be issues in terms of choice and availability of particular foodstuffs, such as fresh fruit and vegetables. The Council was giving consideration to the steps it could take to reduce the likelihood of stockpiling/panic buying behaviour from consumers.
- The city's universities were concerned at the potential adverse effects of a reduction in students, both from their own financial position, but also due to the potential likely adverse effects on the city's economy as a whole.
- It was understood that the UK would no longer be part of Erasmus (the EU programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe). Officers would look into this and inform Members of the present position.
- In the short-term, there was a requirement on the Local Resilience Forum to report any changes to its Impact Assessment to the Government on a weekly basis. Arrangements were in place for the Council to monitor and understand any changes, and take any action required. Following this, work would commence on the Council's medium and longer-term response.
- It was acknowledged that a large proportion of the general public may not be fully aware of the potential adverse effects following EU transition, in particular in the event of a no trade deal being agreed. It was also acknowledged that Brexit was not an event in isolation, as the public and the city were having to deal with continuing issues regarding Covid-19, and there was also the possibility, given the time of year, of potential adverse weather events. The issue as to what message the Council should give to the public, in terms of both informing them of the current position, and to offer some form of reassurance, had been considered. Steps would be taken to ensure that the public were informed that the Council would be taking all possible steps to ensure that any potential adverse effects of the transition were mitigated.

5.7 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the information contained in the report now submitted, together with the information now reported and the responses to the questions raised;
- (b) thanks James Henderson and Catherine Prichard for attending the meeting, and responding to the questions raised; and
- (c) requests the Director of Policy, Performance and Communications to investigate the issues now raised, regarding (i) EU settled status, (ii) the level of Government funding allocated to the Sheffield City Region, (iii) tenant farmers and Graves Park Animal Farm, (iv) careers advice in schools, (v) support for small and medium-sized businesses, (vi) the impact of the transition arrangements on the universities, (vii) Erasmus and (viii) the communication of the impacts of the EU transition to the public of

Sheffield, and to report back to Members on these issues.

6. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

- 6.1 The Policy and Improvement Officer (Alice Nicholson) submitted a report containing the draft Work Programme for 2020/21.
- 6.2 Ms Nicholson made reference to the proposed establishment of a Food Poverty Task and Finish Group, an issue which had been raised at the last meeting. She made a brief presentation on the proposals, reporting on the rise in food poverty, the proposed scope for the Task and Finish Group to consider the Council's response to food poverty, and the membership of the Group.
- 6.3 Members commented on the proposals set out in the presentation, specifically regarding the aims, size and membership, and timeframe for the work, of the Group.
- 6.4 Members raised comments/suggestions regarding other issues the Committee could consider as part of its Work Programme, relating specifically to the Census to be held in March 2021.
- 6.5 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:-
- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the comments now made;
 - (b) approves the proposals now reported regarding the establishment of a cross-party Task and Finish Group on Food Poverty, initially comprising Councillors Douglas Johnson, Cate McDonald, Mick Rooney and Jim Steinke, and requests the Policy and Improvement Officer to make arrangements for the Group to meet mid-January 2021, to discuss the aims and membership, and timeframe for the work of the Group, with further invites being extended to (i) two Members from the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committees and (ii) an appropriate local partner group/organisation; and
 - (c) in the light of the concerns now raised relating to the 2021 Census, particularly regarding the fact that it was to be predominantly online, requests (i) an update on Local Census Liaison plans, support and engagement in completion of the Census and (ii) that an invite be sent for appropriate officers of the City Council and the Office for National Statistics (ONS), to include Richard Crowther (ONS Community Engagement Officer), to attend a future meeting to report on such work.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 7.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday, 28th January 2021, at 10.00 a.m.