

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at ZOOM - [HTTPS://ZOOM.US/](https://zoom.us/), on THURSDAY, 21 MAY 2020 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor N Gregory (Chair)
Councillors A Coote, A Dean, G Driscoll, R Jones, P Lavelle, G LeCount, N Reeve and G Sell

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Assistant Director - Corporate Services), A Bochel (Democratic Services Officer), B Ferguson (Democratic Services Manager), D French (Chief Executive) and A Webb (Director - Finance and Corporate Services)

Other attendees: Councillors J Evans, P Lees, J Lodge and A Storah

SC1 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Committee affirmed a vote of thanks for Councillor Caton who was stepping down from the Committee, and welcomed Councillor Dean.

The Chair gave the following updates on task and finish groups:

- Work was progressing by the Planning Advisory Service on the report to inform the Major Planning Applications Task and Finish Group.
- The Planning Obligations and Conditions Task and Finish Group would likely report at the next Scrutiny Committee meeting.
- Meaningful progress had been made by the Airport Fly Parking Task and Finish Group, but progress had slowed because this was not so much an issue at present.

Councillor LeCount updated the Committee on the funding of the Stansted Airport Community Trust. He said further information on the Trust's spending would be available at its August meeting. He understood that Stansted Airport was not planning any further contributions to the Trust.

Councillor LeCount said that a review of the Audiominutes system had been due to take place, but that this had been impossible due to the public health emergency. Public meetings had been conducted via Zoom with Audiominutes broadcasting live, and so the system appeared to be working well with the changes that had been implemented and reported at the prior Scrutiny Committee meeting.

SC2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Criscione.

SC3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a correct record. The Chair said he would sign them at his earliest opportunity.

SC4 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

In response to a member question, the Chief Executive noted that items listed on the Cabinet Forward Plan for the May and July meetings were expected to go ahead as planned.

SC5 MANAGING THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY

The Chief Executive gave a summary of the report which set out a brief overview of the work of the Council, so far, in responding to the public health emergency.

In response to questions from members, the Chief Executive said the outcome of the formal review of how the Essex Resilience Forum had responded to the public health emergency could be reported to the Scrutiny Committee. At present it was difficult to tell where the focus of the Scrutiny Committee might best be served within the Council, but an internal review would be carried out.

In response to member questions, the Chief Executive said staff were being supported in a range of ways, including encouraging them to take appropriate precautions, keeping in touch with them and ensuring that they were fit and well. Staff who could not work were still retained on their full salary. It was informally reported that staff felt there was a greater sense of trust in them since they began working from home during the lockdown, but that some staff were having trouble feeling that they could adequately separate their home and work lives.

In response to a member question, the Chief Executive said some business grants took longer than others to process because the applications were much more complex. Of the £20 million allocated for business grants, £18 million had so far been allocated. The Director – Finance and Corporate Services said some businesses had been reluctant to claim, but the Council was encouraging them to do so. The government allowed 5% of the business grants allocated to be distributed at the Council's discretion to those businesses that did not meet the criteria for grants.

In response to a member question, the Chief Executive said queues at recycling centres were to be expected given the social distancing guidelines in place. The Director – Finance and Corporate Services said there was currently no green bag collection service in place.

In response to a member question, the Chief Executive said the Council would in time reflect on its response, both in terms of what went well and what could have been done better, and the findings would be reported to the Scrutiny Committee. The Chair asked that the matter be on the agenda at the September meeting.

In response to a member question, the Chief Executive said officers were working with other stakeholders to assess how to manage traffic in crowded areas. Several Traffic Regulation Orders had been applied for.

SC6 CORPORATE PLAN DELIVERY PLAN

The Director – Finance and Corporate Services said that the Council had forecast to MHCLG a predicted shortfall of £5.26 million due to the coronavirus pandemic. The Council had also declared £1.366 million in unallocated reserves, which could be used to help support the Council budget if required.

The Leader said many of the actions the Council had been looking to take were up in the air due to the financial uncertainty caused by the coronavirus pandemic. This had necessitated a review of the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan. This amended plan had been published as a supplement to the Cabinet agenda for 27 May.

SC7 LOCAL PLAN

The Leader said the Council was expecting a scoping report from the East of England Local Government Association (LGA) shortly. This had been delayed due to the pandemic. This report would look at how to formulate a new plan and examine tying together several reviews of the planning function. The caveat to this was that cost might be restrictive.

Members noted that documentation from the LGA could not be provided to the Scrutiny Committee due to the delays, and so there was little more the Committee could do at the present. However it was important for the Committee to be kept aware of developments.

Some members noted that it was important to take time to consider the matter carefully in order to ensure that the correct action was taken.

The meeting closed at 9.25.