

**Notes of a meeting of the Covid Response Working Group
held on Microsoft Teams**

Monday 9th November 2020 – 6pm

Present

Cllr Andy Foulsham (Chair)
Cllr Gabby Barody (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Cheryl Briggs
Cllr Eric de la Harpe
Cllr Alex Greenaway
Cllr Lorraine Oates.

In attendance

Louise Brown Communications, Marketing and Events Officer (CME Officer)
Nigel Warner Town Clerk

1. Election of Chair

Resolved: that Cllr Andy Foulsham be elected Chair of the Group for the year 2020/21 (proposed by Cllr Lorraine Oates, seconded by Cllr Gabby Barody)

2. Election of Vice-Chair

Resolved: that Cllr Gabby Barody be elected Vice-Chair of the Group for the year 2020/21 (proposed by Cllr Andy Foulsham, seconded by Cllr Lorraine Oates)

3. Apologies

Ex-officio members Cllr Charlie Birks (Mayor) and Samantha Bowring (Chair F and GP/ Leader). **Noted.**

4. Terms of reference as agreed by the Town Council on 4th November 2020

The Group's Terms of Reference were noted: "to make any urgent decisions relating to the Covid-19 emergency which the Town clerk decides need to be determined before the next scheduled committee meeting which would normally cover the matter."

5. Update from officers on the Council's Covid response

Guildhall and Museum closed during the lockdown period (to 3rd December 2020). Other services continue to operate within the constraints of the Covid restrictions.

The CME Officer reported that she is again working with the Abingdon Community Response Group and offering administrative support. She was providing phone and admin support, calling new sign ups and matching volunteers with neighbourhood co-coordinators. There was also an article in the latest Town Crier.

Town Clerk reported that he had written to VWHDC (Asst Chief Executive Adrienne Partridge) offering town council assistance during the crisis. E-mail detail below:

Town Clerk "with the lockdown in England from Thursday onwards we will again have to close the Museum to the public. This means that we would have some capacity amongst our staff to take on work from the district council during the continued crisis. We would be keen to engage with yourselves on this if we can help at all and if this is something we are able to pursue I can let you know in more detail what capacity we have." Adrienne Partridge at District Council had responded that "At the moment we haven't seen a significant increase in community support requests, but it is extremely early days and we know it will be a long winter..... I have let Ben Coleman and Louise Birt know you are keen to support us, Ben is our Community Hub Manager and Louise is our Team Leader. They will be in touch I'm sure as the days/weeks progress."

(CME Officer left the meeting at this point).

6. Free school meals in school holidays.

The Group noted that the Council had at its meeting of 4th November 2020 resolved that:

"This Council acknowledges that the absence of free school meals over school holidays is a real issue for some residents of Abingdon.

"We thank businesses, including Willow Shakes, Annie's Tea Rooms and The Barns Cafe and organisations such as the Abingdon Food Bank, the Community Fridge and the SOFEA Larder at Abingdon Carousel that have helped by providing food for local children who are usually in receipt of free school meals over half term.

"In the absence of a scheme from UK government or Oxfordshire County Council to provide food to families in receipt of free school meals over the Christmas holidays, we commit to working with councillor colleagues from the Vale of White Horse District Council & Oxfordshire County Council to meet the need for such meals over Christmas in the belief that no child should go hungry."

Members noted that although the government had appeared to change its policy and had said that they would now be providing free school meals over school holidays, there was little detail at this stage. Consequently Members considered that the council should contact the various organisations detailed in the motion to assess the position and find out how the council can work with them on this matter.

A Member raised the issue of winter clothing and the fact that some children do not have a good outdoor coat. This was agreed as another area of concern that should be addressed.

The following actions were agreed:

- a. Officers to write to all the schools both primary and secondary and tell them about the motion which was passed at the council meeting last week. We are aware that the government has now announced a scheme to provide for free school meals over school holidays but as yet we have no details. We are keen to work with our partners on this matter and would be pleased if they were able to let us know the numbers (not the names) of students who live in Abingdon who get free school meals. We would also be pleased to have their thoughts on how this can be taken forward. On a related matter the council is also concerned regarding winter clothing and students who may not, for example have a proper winter coat. Again it would be helpful if they had a perspective on this, what help is out there for students affected and any ideas on how we might help.
- b. Officers to write to Willow Shakes, Annie's Tea Rooms and The Barns Cafe and tell them about the motion which was passed at the council meeting last week. Thank them for what they have done to help provide for food for local children over half-term. We are aware that the government has now announced a scheme to provide for free school meals over school holidays but as yet we have no details. We are keen to work with our partners on this matter and would be pleased to know if they would be willing to work with us and to have their thoughts on how this can be taken forward.
- c. Officers to write to the Abingdon Food Bank, the Community Fridge and the SOFEA Larder at Abingdon and tell them about the motion which was passed at the council meeting last week. Thank them for their work on this specific matter and also their ongoing work in the town. We are aware that the government has now announced a scheme to provide for free school meals over school holidays but as yet we have no details. We are keen to work with our partners on this matter and would be pleased to know if they would be willing to work with us and to have their thoughts on how this can be taken forward. . On a related matter the council is also concerned regarding winter clothing and students who may not, for example have a proper winter coat. Again it would be helpful if they had a perspective on this, what help is out there for students affected and any ideas on how we might help.
- d. Officers to write to the Abbey Cinema and tell them about the motion which was passed at the council meeting last week. Thank them for what they have done to help provide for food for local children over half-term. We are aware that the government has now announced a scheme to provide for free school meals over school holidays but as yet we have no details. We are keen to work with our partners on this matter and would be pleased to know if they would be willing to work with us and to have their thoughts on how this can be taken forward.

- e. Cllr Andy Foulsham to contact the District Council (Cabinet Member Cllr Helen Pighills), as per the motion above and the subsequent discussions at today's meeting.
 - f. Cllr Gabby Barody to contact Oxfordshire County Council as per the motion above and the subsequent discussions at today's meeting.
- To report back next week and then consider:
- a. Contacting local supermarkets;
 - b. Social media/ news update.

7. Budget

Group noted that Town Council had made the Covid response grants fund available for the at the disposal of the Group.

Town Clerk reported that council had set aside a sum of £20,000 of which £3,344 had been spent and £16,656 remained.

8. Next meeting

Monday 16th November – 6pm
(Group will meet every week at 6pm on a Monday).

The meeting rose at 6.53pm.