

Report of the Sevenoaks District Council Covid-19 response In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group

Report of the Sevenoaks District Council Covid-19 response In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group

At a meeting of The Scrutiny Committee it was agreed that an in-depth working group would be formed to consider the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and assess the effectiveness of the Emergency Plan and District Emergency Centre (DEC) and identify areas of improvement.

Members were Cllr James Osborne-Jackson (Chairman), Cllr George Pender, Cllr James London and Cllr Alan Layland.

Sevenoaks District Council Officers who gave evidence were Pav Ramewal (Chief Executive), Adrian Rowbotham (Chief Officer), Richard Morris (Chief Officer) and Sarah Robson (Chief Officer)

Cllr Peter Fleming (Leader of the Council) also gave evidence.

This working group has provided an important role in scrutinising decisions and spending which happened throughout the pandemic and it is only right that Members and Officers are held to account and scrutinised for their decisions.

The majority of members were hesitant about the reliance on volunteers in the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic; however, all members were impressed with the efforts and effectiveness of the volunteers within their communities

Sevenoaks District Council led by example in a number of ways across departments, including adding additional items to the food boxes delivered to vulnerable people, sending planning site notices via the post for applicants to display and hiring Community Ambassadors to represent the Council and serve our District.

Although the geographic allocation of the Community Ambassadors did take into account the opinions of Local Members, the Working Group felt that discussion on how more proactive engagement with all Members would have meant that they were more informed on the Council's response

The working group has agreed to recommend that the Emergency Plan be reviewed at least every 2 years by the Chief Executive, as it was found the Emergency Plan was out of date by having staff members listed who had long left the Council. The emergency plan should also be used after a major incident.

The Working Group also reviewed the Emergency Command Centre, and found that many of the supplies therein were expired, broken, or lost. The Working Group recommends stricter auditing to ensure that all resources are kept up to date and organised

The Chairman, Cllr Osborne-Jackson visited Dunbrik Depot to hear how the Direct Services team found working throughout the pandemic. It was clear that they were well looked after and provided with PPE.

It is clear that by having the Direct Services in house that loyalty was provided by the team and the weekly waste collection continues. Parking Enforcement Officers quickly swapped roles and started delivering food boxes, another example of how fantastic in-house services are.

A special mention to the Elections team, who assisted Estates with cleaning the building during the lockdown and distributing PPE. This clearly was not within their job description however they served their colleagues well.

The working group feels that it took longer than planned for the Emergency Plan to be put into action and it is recommended a mini peer review take place on the Emergency Plan to provide friendly and impartial advice.

Recommendations of the report (to Scrutiny to recommend that Cabinet approve):

- o A small peer review of the Emergency Plan be undertaken
- o The Emergency Plan be reviewed by the Chief Executive every 2 years, to ensure it is up-to-date
- o The Emergency Plan be reviewed by Members every 4 years, either at Cabinet or the relevant Advisory Committee
- o The process for getting volunteers be formalised to create a body of trained volunteers with available contact details
- o Scenario Exercises be undertaken every 4 years, with the involvement of Gold and Silver Commanders
- o The inventory of the Emergency Command Centre be regularly audited and kept in better condition.

As Chairman, I would like to thank all the Members and Officers who provided input to this report.

ENDS