

Emergency Pandemic Committee 30th November 2020

Guy Langton



Notes from the meeting following the second national lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic

Members present:

Cllr E Hards (Mayor)
Cllr M Khan (Leader of Didcot Town Council), chairing the meeting.
Cllr A Macdonald (Vice-Chair of the Environment and Climate Committee)
Cllr J Moody (Chair of the Finance Committee)
Cllr P Siggers (Chair of the Civic Hall Management Committee)
Cllr P Giesberg
Cllr M Mallows
Cllr A Hudson
Cllr P Davies (observing)

Apologies:

Cllr A Dearlove

Officers present:

Tony Rudge (Outside Services Manager)
Janet Wheeler (Town Clerk)
Guy Langton (Planning & Environment Officer – taking notes)

Cllr Khan opened the meeting thanking all for attending at short notice and during daytime hours. He continued to remind members that the Council had called an emergency Full Council meeting for the 8th December to consider the future of the Willowbrook site. The meeting this afternoon was to review the new Tier 2 regulations regarding the pandemic and whether this will allow us to re-open Council facilities safely in the community.

1. Update / learnings from current lockdown

The Town Clerk reported that the work situation agreed had been successful through the November 2020 lockdown, with staff accessing the office as they needed to and there always being at least one member of staff available to ensure the Civic Hall

doors remained open to the public Monday to Friday during business hours throughout.

In response to a question from Cllr Hudson, the Town Clerk reminded members that they were able to collect agenda and minute papers from the Civic Hall during normal business hours, or outside those hours by arrangement.

2. Review and impact of being in Tier 2 for:

a. Civic Hall

The Town Clerk reported that Didcot, along with the rest of Oxfordshire and much of England, was in Tier 2 rather than Tier 1 as it was prior to the start of the November lockdown. This had lead her to conclude that the Civic Hall could be opened for the NHS (outdoor testing, blood transfusion and possibly as a vaccination centre), for activities involving under-18s that had proven themselves to be Covid-19 secure. The advice for other adult activities such as Slimming World was less clear and she requested the views of the Councillors in whether they could safely open again.

Cllr Khan confirmed that Didcot Civic Hall was on a list of probable venues for the Covid-19 vaccination programme and that the building could effectively be split into two parts, the Main Hall, Northbourne Room and Reception being accessed from the carpark entrance and Ladygrove and upstairs rooms from the Broadway entrance, allowing for vaccinations to take place whilst more normal Civic Hall activities continued (if approved). Toilet provision would be marshalled as necessary and matting and lights may be required if people were to exit through the garden into the car park.

Cllr Siggers sought clarity as to the exclusion of groups like Slimming World, though a vaccination program using the Hall would take priority. Cllr Giesberg considered it important to use the guidance to help the Hall remain open rather than to find reasons to close.

The Town Clerk confirmed that she would meet with the Slimming World organisers to ensure their risk assessment took account of the changes and possible increased membership numbers. Though it may cause a booking conflict with another group, should vaccinations be taking place.

All members agreed that the Civic Hall should open within the guidelines, risk assessments from Hall hirers to be sought and the reopening will be communicated in DTC social media channels.

b. Staff

The Town Clerk reported that it would be hard to ensure full staff cover for the Civic Hall in the New Year, the Deputy Civic Hall Manager's notice being over at the end of December 2020 and one member of staff on maternity leave. If the NHS make use of the Hall for vaccinations, then more staff would be needed. Staff that needed to take public transport to work would be asked to travel at times other than peak times to minimise their exposure. A rota would have to be devised if staff were needed to be there more regularly than was currently the case.

Cllr Khan confirmed it was his expectation that there would always be two members of staff or Councillors at the Hall for reasons of safety and that he would be willing to be at the Hall in the evening to ensure this was the case. He expected that other Councillors would equally be willing to lend assistance in instances of short staffing. A rota will be circulated to allow sufficient time for staff and councillors to put in their diaries should they be needed for evening closing of office and Civic Hall.

All members agreed that the current staffing arrangements would continue until either the County entered Tier 1 or the situation regarding vaccination and use of the Civic Hall required other arrangements.

c. Council and its committees

All members agreed that virtual meetings would continue, these having proved to be a success thus far.

d. Outdoor Services

The Outdoor Services Manager reported that the Outdoor Staff were now back to full strength, with the return of a member of the team who had been on long term sick-leave, albeit on reduced hours. He confirmed that all playgrounds had remained open throughout the November 2020 lockdown in line with Government Guidance, and that following that guidance the tennis courts and outdoor gyms would be reopened from the 2nd December 2020. In response to a question from Cllr Hudson, he confirmed that youth football would be allowed to restart.

All agreed to put details of the recreation facilities that were to be opened and that had remained open throughout on the Council's website and social media pages.

3. AOB

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 14:30.

Guy Langton
Planning & Environment Officer.