

Agenda item: FC 175/20

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 13th July 2020

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To update the Council on Community Centre re-opening.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That council notes the report**
- 2. That the Operations Manager continues to monitor government guidelines, best practice, and other relevant advice**
- 3. That regular reviews of community centres continue throughout 2020/21, until such time as risk has reduced**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Following the legislation that led to community centres closing in March, the four centres managed by WCC have been closed to the public. Coffee Hall Meeting Place (CHMP) has been used by officers to support the delivery of food supplies and, more recently, as a base for the unpaid work team to access facilities.

With the news last week that centres can re-open, the officer team have been working to provide the necessary plans to enable this. This has included:

- Reviewing risk assessments
- Provision of additional safety elements (e.g. sanitiser stations, one way systems, signage, etc.)
- Review of paperwork, to include a Covid-19 checklist and disclaimer
- Liaison with Insurance company to ensure suitable coverage
- Testing to ensure all utilities are safe (e.g. legionella testing)
- Communications with renters to keep up to date.

There are some limitations within existing plans, both in terms of activities and numbers.

Capacities for all centres will reduce, in line with social distancing guidelines. This means maximum capacities for Netherfield Meeting Place (NFMP) and Eaglestone Activity Centre (EAC) main halls will be thirty (30) people. For Tinkers Bridge Meeting Place (TBMP) which is smaller, the capacity will be twenty (20). For small meeting room at EAC, capacity will be six (6).

Additionally, there are activities that are limited within centres. Any activity that increases the likelihood of airborne particles or other forms of contamination is restricted. This includes:

- No indoor physical exercise (e.g. aerobics, karate, etc.)
- No singing or live performances (although screened performances are okay)
- No provision of food / drinks, excepting drinks in disposable cups.
 - o Please note that kitchens will be 'out of bounds' for food preparation within NFMP, TBMP and EAC.
 - o CHMP may be used by WCC officers / volunteers to provide food options, including community fridge and summer food projects.

These changes mean that it is likely that some groups will not restart their bookings at this time, due to cost implications. For example, many of our faith group renters are larger groups that depend upon donations to cover the costs. With significantly lower numbers, this may mean that this is unaffordable. The Operations team continue to liaise with renters to try and fully assess this.

In addition to the issues noted above, we also currently have most of our caretaker team on 'furlough'. This means that they have, until recently, been unable to work and, at time of writing, there remains a lack of work to be undertaken. Work that is needed is being covered by our Caretaker Manager, who has not been furloughed due to the different nature of her employment.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Some spend may be deemed necessary however we are unsure until the base work has been completed. Suspected spend could be:

- Pedal bins needed (to limit touch points)
- Disabled access (ramps etc.) may be needed at some exit points (whereby we would not usually use this as an entry or exit)
- A review of inventories completed by the Caretaker Manager will be completed and any high priority procurement to ensure safety compliance may be ordered.

The RFO recommends that delegated power is issued to sanction works that may be needed or procurement that may be needed within reason to ensure **safety compliance** and to feed back to this committee on any spend in respect to this at the next Finance and resources committee.

We have amended the meeting places costs line from £40,000 to £32,000 (a decrease of £8000 due to the closures) any repairs or installations that are deemed necessary for safety compliance in order to reopen on 1st August 2020 will be deducted from this budget line and therefore careful monitoring needs to take place.

We are still in the process of investigating timings and how many bookings we can facilitate safely, as well as how many groups we can appropriately assist therefore a more substantial update on our income from hall hire can be given once we have concreted the specifics.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

Falls within existing remits. There will come a point where furloughed caretakers return to work, in time for 1st August suggested reopening, however the Caretaker at CHMP may need to continue to be furloughed should we be unable to offer to external renters, further investigation is needed to make this decision but it is unclear at this time when this might happen.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None perceived.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None.

AUTHORS

Steve McNay – Council Manager / Samone Winsborough – Ops Manager and RFO

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 13th July 2020

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To update the Council on the new Code of Conduct consultation.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That the council notes the report**
- 2. That the council consider their response to the new code expanding the issues around declaring interests, specifically**
 - a. the expansion to ‘friend, relative or close associate’, and**
 - b. the inclusion of the bodies covered in Appendix B / Table 1**
- 3. That the council agrees the following responses from the council as a whole**
 - a. That a review of the Code of Conduct is welcomed**
 - b. That the impact of any Code is dependent on having suitable sanctions where breaches occur**
 - c. That this review does not sufficiently address the lack of sanction and this council would welcome additional work to identify and include a new sanctions regime to sit within the overall code**
 - d. That the responses to the specific questions noted are submitted as laid out in the attached paper, to include decisions regarding recommendation 2 above.**
- 4. That individual councillors and / or officers can, if they choose so to do, respond as individuals, but should be clear that this is the case.**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

The Local Government Association has, for some time, been considering a new Code of Conduct that would sit across the tiers of local government. Here in Milton Keynes, this would include Milton Keynes Council (as the principle authority) and the town, parish, and community councils.

This work started in response to recommendations by the Committee on Standards in Public Life’s report into Local Government Ethical Standards. This, alongside some high-profile cases where councillors (and in some cases officers) behaviour has fallen well short of what should be considered reasonable, has led to this review, document and consultation.

The new document remains broadly based on the ‘Nolan Principles’ – the seven principles of public life, those being:

- **Selflessness** – Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.
- **Integrity** – Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.
- **Objectivity** – Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
- **Accountability** – Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
- **Openness** – Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
- **Honesty** – Holders of public office should be truthful
- **Leadership** – Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

However, the new document goes further, with what are described as ‘minimum standards’ expected. These are also referred to as the 12 Specific Obligations (I have reduced for ease of use):

- **Civility** – treating people in a civil manner (includes other councillors, staff, public, etc.)
- **Bullying and harassment** – not bullying or harassing people
- **Impartiality of officers of the council** - not compromising, or attempting to compromise, the impartiality of anyone who works for, or on behalf of, the council.
- **Confidentiality and access to information** – not using confidential information incorrectly, but equally allowing access to information that should be accessible
- **Disrepute** - not bringing the role or council into disrepute.
- **Councillor position** - not using, or attempting to use, your position to advantage or disadvantage yourself or others
- **Use of council resources and facilities** - not misusing council resources.
- **Interests** - registering and declaring all relevant interests.
- **Gifts and hospitality** - not accepting significant gifts or hospitality from persons seeking to acquire, develop or do business with the council or from persons who may apply to the council for any permission, licence or other significant advantage and registering where such gifts have been accepted

These may seem obvious things, but the LGA have clearly felt it necessary to be explicit, which suggests that there are still people who don't comply with the above!

This section of the document is followed by an explanation of sanctions – there are sanctions if you fail to declare interests (this is potentially a criminal offence) and the document talks of political party sanctions and similar, but it

remains that case that there are NO sanctions in place for breaches of this code, with the exception of being unable to chair or sit on a committee for 2 months.

There are further appendices which should be read to get a fuller picture of what is being proposed, but the above forms the body of the Code. This includes the details of expanding the declaration of interests to include 'friends, relatives and close associates' and a list of bodies that membership would trigger a need to register.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

None.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

None.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

As noted above, the lack of effective sanction means that this document has limited benefit. It has been written from the perspective of principle authorities, rather than parish, town or community councils, in the view of the Council Manager. Whilst having a robust and effective Code of Conduct is an essential element of council life, the Council Manager considers this to be something of a missed opportunity.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Local Government Association Consultation on the Draft Model Member Code of Conduct.

Local Government Association Model Member Code of Conduct.

Proposed WCC response to consultation.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

Agenda item: FC 176/20

Proposed WCC response to consultation

This details the proposed response to the Local Government Association consultation on the new model code of conduct and should be read in conjunction with the new model code and the paper for Full Council.

Responses are being collected online, so this paper lays out the questions that are being asked, alongside suggested responses.

There are some specific areas for consideration within the Full Council meeting, highlighted on the agenda and papers. These relate specifically to Questions 11 – 13.

Q1. To what extent do you support the proposal that councillors demonstrate the behaviours set out in the Code when they are publicly acting as, identifying as, and/or giving the impression that they are acting as a councillor, including when representing their council on official business and when using social media?

To a moderate extent

Q2. Is it sufficiently clear which parts of the Model Code are legal requirements, which are obligations, and which are guidance?

No

Q3. Do you prefer the use of the personal tense, as used in the Code, or would you prefer the passive tense?

The passive tense (e.g. 'Councillors should', rather than 'I should')

Q4. To what extent do you support the 12 specific obligations?

We feel these are the very basic expectations and as such support them fully

Q5. If you would like to propose additional or alternative obligations, or would like to provide more comment on a specific obligation, please do so here:

Q6. Would you prefer to see the obligations as a long list followed by the guidance, or as it is set out in the current draft, with the guidance after each obligation?

As now – obligation and then guidance.

Q7. To what extent do you think the concept of ‘acting with civility’ is sufficiently clear?

Q7a. If you would like to suggest an alternative phrase that captures the same meaning, or would like to provide a comment on this concept, please do so here: *(NB This supplementary question is provided for all questions from q7 to Q9)*

We feel that this should be easily understood, but often isn't. Examples may be helpful. And ‘subject to unreasonable or excessive personal attacks’ – personal attacks are, almost by definition, excessive and unreasonable as a councillor. Challenge the behaviours, challenge the attitudes, challenge the belief, but personal attacks should never be part of a councillor's behaviour.

Q8. To what extent do you think the concept of ‘bringing the council into disrepute’ is sufficiently clear?

It is not a wide enough scope. Dishonesty and deceitfulness (arguably the same thing) are one small aspect of what could bring the council into disrepute. Needs expanding, especially with regard to social media stuff, which brings the council into disrepute very easily.

Q9. To what extent do you support the definition of bullying and harassment used in the code in a local government context?

We do not. Limiting bullying and harassment to Equalities legislation means that people could treat others extremely badly but say it isn't due to a protected characteristic so its not bullying. It is.

Q10. Is there sufficient reference to the use of social media?

No

Q10a. Should social media be covered in a separate code or integrated into the overall code of conduct?

It should sit within the overall code but be highlighted within each area. This is, in our opinion, the area where more and more issues are arising and as such, the code should reflect the way that communications are changing.

Q10b. If you would like to make any comments or suggestions in relation to how the use of social media is covered in the code please do so here:

Q11. To what extent do you support the code going beyond the current requirement to declare interests of the councillor and their partner?

? – To be discussed at Full Council

Q12. Should the requirement to declare interests be in the main body of the code or in the appendix where the draft model code currently references it?

? – To be discussed at Full Council

Q13. To what extent do you support the inclusion of these additional categories for registration?

- Any organisation, association, society or party of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management and to which you are appointed or nominated by the council
- Any organisation, association, society or party that exercises functions of a public nature of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management
- Any organisation, association, society or party directed to charitable purposes
- Any organisation, association, society or party of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union)

Q13a. If you would like to propose additional or alternative categories for registration, please provide them here:

? – To be discussed at Full Council

Q14. To what extent do you support the proposed requirement that councillors do not accept significant gifts as set out in Obligation 11?

We support this, whilst acknowledging that this is a much lesser issue for local councils than principle authorities.

Q15. The draft code proposes £25 as the threshold for registering gifts and hospitality. Is this an appropriate threshold?

Yes.

Q16. The LGA will be producing accompanying guidance to the code. Which of the following types of guidance would you find most useful? Please rank 1-5, with 1 being the most useful:

- Regularly updated examples of case law
- Explanatory guidance on the code
- Case studies and examples of good practice
- Supplementary guidance that focuses on specific areas, e.g., social media
- Improvement support materials, such as training and e-learning packages

Q16a. If you would like to suggest any other accompanying guidance please do so here:

Q17. If you would like to make any further comments about the code please so here:

The lack of any real sanction continues the unfortunate place we find ourselves in, where councillors can behave in what can only be described as appalling ways and experience no sanction. This can leave other councillors, officers and members of the public in a position where they have no choice but to work alongside, work for or be represented by people who are abusive, bigoted, bullies.

Having a realistic level of sanction is essential if public confidence in elected representatives is going to be maintained and improved.

We would welcome a more considered approach to sanctions, potentially with an increasing level if behaviour is repeated. The maximum suggested within this consultation is that someone cannot sit on a committee to two months. This is insufficient.

Agenda item: FC 177/20

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 13th July 2020

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To provide council with an update on the Covid 19 Local Outbreak Plan.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That council notes the report.**
- 2. That council notes the Local Outbreak Plan from MK Council.**
- 3. That council agrees to Council Manager continuing to develop plans for any recurrence of lockdown, local need, and impact of post Covid 19 changes.**
- 4. That council notes the additional provision and steps towards recovery that have been identified, alongside agreement for supporting public engagement via trailer.**
- 5. That Covid 19 updates sit as part of Full Council agenda until resolved.**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

With the first phase of the pandemic now complete, restrictions easing and a slow move towards re-opening those places that have been closed, there is concern that there remains potential for a further outbreak or recurrence of Covid 19. We have seen localised outbreaks in other areas (such as Leicester), in specific employers (such as the meat factory in Wales) and in other confined communities (such as schools, nurseries, etc.).

To reduce the potential for this to happen within MK, MK Council has produced a Local Outbreak Plan, as part of the national approach to the next stage of managing the pandemic.

The plan covers a number of key areas:

- Care homes and providers (with some of those being within Woughton)
- Health Services (hospital, GP's, etc. within the parish)
- Educational settings (schools, college, pre-schools – many on parish)
- Businesses, workplaces and venues
- Transport (lowest car ownership in the city within Woughton, so significant issue)
- Retail and leisure
- Places of worship (churches, Gurdwara, Islamic Centre, Jehovahs Witness temple, etc.)
- Higher risk communities
 - o Black and Minority Ethnic groups (high representation within the parish)

- Areas of deprivation (Woughton is one of the most deprived parishes in the city)
- Socially excluded and vulnerable groups

These key areas cover the city as a whole, but there are a number of these which have particular relevance to our parish, as detailed above and noted in Appendix 1 of the Local Outbreak Plan.

The plan goes on to explain response and accountability for outbreaks (minor and major) in the key settings, with responses being led by health officials.

It also speaks to testing regimes and options.

This document provides a starting point for management of the virus, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities locally. However, it has been stated that this should be considered a starting point and will be regularly reviewed.

Linked to the Outbreak Plan, Woughton Community Council has also worked on a 'recovery' approach, looking at the immediate and longer-term needs for the council and the residents of the parish. All aspects of this have Covid 19 considered within, with a view that reducing infections and ensuring safety must be the priority. This approach includes:

Prioritising the focus of services. This was discussed within Services Committee at the end of June, with an agreement that priorities were:

- Restarting of the Community Fridge.
 - Engagement with residents using the Trailer
 - Provision of food for young people over summer holidays
 - Play Rangers activities during summer
- Redesign of the Hub offices, with associated safety measures, to enable officers to use the offices where appropriate.
 - Linked to above, access to suitable space for 1:1 appointments, specifically around advice service, utilising the Wellbeing Room
 - Assessment of officer time, accessibility of the offices, use of additional space and enabling working from home where suitable.

There is no question that the impact of Covid 19 will continue for many months and years. Further recommendations from the Council Manager at this point include:

- Council meetings being held remotely to continue throughout 2020 and reviewed at Full Council in January 2021
- Flexible approaches with council officers regarding work base to continue; the main office which usually seats 10 will be reduced to 3 and even with use of other areas, to ensure suitable distancing, the one way system and safety of all, home working should be considered where appropriate.
- Continued liaison with colleagues across MK Council, health services, etc. to ensure that WCC responds accordingly to any resurfacing or increase in local infection rates, supporting where possible.

There is further work that is being undertaken to create and consult on a 'post CV-19' plan, to include looking at the longer term impact on our communities. It is unclear at this point as to what the full effect may be, but there is a fear that:

- With furlough reducing and then stopping, there is potential for increased redundancies and job losses. We have already seen some of this with Adele foods.
- Universal Credit applications and associated elements relating to Universal Credit (such as sanctioning, reducing levels, etc.)
- Homelessness, evictions and housing crises. The moratorium on possession action is coming to an end and we are likely to see an increase in housing need

This is in addition to the issues that existed prior to the pandemic. The need for accessible education, training and employment support is clear and work was being undertaken with MKC around 'Job Club Plus' provision and a review of this will be needed over the coming months.

This situation is changing hugely, often with very short timescales for responding. As has happened with many changes from the government, guidance changes often with only days (and sometimes less) to address and make adjustments. Local lock down, if it does happen, is likely to mean any response will need to be made within 24 – 28 hours. We need to be prepared where possible, have a range of options in place and be able to respond.

To start to explore some of these issues, we shall be starting a fuller engagement programme from Monday 13th July (date of this meeting). This will, we hope, involve a range of officers, councillors and external agencies (e.g. TVP) and to do this, we would request councillors 'sign up' where safe to do so (e.g. where health issues allow).

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Unclear at this time. This will form part of the planning and assessment over the coming months and, we would think, September will offer a clearer picture of the coming months.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

The demands to deliver the ambitious plans in place are considerable; we continue to deliver all the previous services, with additional demands from the food parcel service and community support which will be further increased with public engagement. In the event that there are further impacts (e.g. staffing issues, further lock down issues, etc.), there will be further demands on the staff.

There are also staffing implications relating to the pandemic where some staff members are unable to attend / deliver in the usual way. This includes those with family commitments, those with health issues or similar.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None perceived.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Local Outbreak Plan

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager