

SOUTH LAKELAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the proceedings at a virtual meeting of the Council held on Tuesday, 15 December 2020, at 6.30 p.m.

Present
Councillors

Stephen Coleman (Chairman)
Pete McSweeney (Vice-Chairman)

Giles Archibald	Gill Gardner	Helen Ladhams
Robin Ashcroft	Tom Harvey	Malcolm Lamb
Rupert Audland	Eamonn Hennessy	Kevin Lancaster
Pat Bell	Hazel Hodgson	Susanne Long
Ben Berry	Chris Hogg	Ian Mitchell
Roger Bingham	Rachael Hogg	Suzie Pye
Jonathan Brook	John Holmes	Doug Rathbone
Helen Chaffey	Kevin Holmes	Matt Severn
Brian Cooper	Vicky Hughes	Peter Thornton
Michael Cornah	Helen Irving	David Webster
Tracy Coward	Andrew Jarvis	Ian Wharton
Philip Dixon	Janette Jenkinson	Janet Willis
Judy Filmore	Dyan Jones	Mark Wilson

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Caroline Airey, Alvin Finch, Dave Khan, Jon Owen, Brian Rendell and Shirley-Anne Wilson.

Also in attendance at the meeting was Mrs Sally Parnaby, Chairman of the Independent Remuneration Panel.

Officers

Courage	Legal, Governance and Democracy Specialist
Aiguobasinmwin	
Inge Booth	Legal, Governance and Democracy Specialist
Lawrence Conway	Chief Executive
Linda Fisher	Legal, Governance and Democracy Lead Specialist (Monitoring Officer)
Simon McVey	Operational Lead Support Services
Helen Smith	Finance Lead Specialist (Section 151 Officer)
David Sykes	Director of Strategy, Innovation and Resources

C/73

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Following confirmation that the live stream of the meeting had commenced, the Chairman welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting. He referred to the new Government legislation allowing councils to conduct remote meetings and explained in detail to all taking part, and for the benefit of members of the public observing, the procedures for the meeting. The Chairman then asked the Legal, Governance and Democracy Lead Specialist (Monitoring Officer) to carry out a roll call, during which all Members present indicated by which means they were taking part and confirmed that they were able to see (where practicable) and hear all Members participating in the meeting. The Chairman referred to officers present who would introduce themselves when asked to address the meeting.

C/74 EMERGENCY NON-EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

No Member having raised concern when asked by the Chairman, it was

RESOLVED – That

(1) the Emergency Non-Executive Decision (016 13-11-20 Local Restrictions Support Grants (Closed)) taken by the Chief Executive in accordance with Part 3 of the Council's Constitution 3.(B 1) (1.1) be received; and

(2) any spending outside any budgetary provision be noted.

C/75 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr Ian Kell was connected to the meeting via audio and introduced by the Chairman. He addressed Council with regard to Agenda Item No.6 – Report from the Independent Remuneration Panel for 2021/2022 to 2024/25.

Mr Kell suggested that a vote would shortly be taken for Members to take nearly 3% of total Council funds for themselves. They would be invited to vote for a four-year escalator and an automatic increase each year of probably over 2% each year. Mr Kell said that, as Council funds shrunk and social demands grew ever more costly, Members would probably take for themselves an ever bigger slice from the diminishing public purse. He referred to Tim Farron, Member of Parliament for Westmorland and Lonsdale, having in October called a similar increase proposed for M.P.s "deeply inappropriate"; another local M.P. had referred to it as "utterly staggering"; and on the previous Friday, Mr Kell pointed out, the Regulator had stopped the M.P.'s increase.

Mr Kell's concern was not so much with this award to Members but with the systemic gerrymandering, in their name, of the Panel which determined it. Mr Kell had, over time, examined the workings of the Panel and, through eight applications to join it, had come to a decision that the "Independent" in Independent Remuneration Panel was a misnomer. Mr Kell said that the membership of the Panel was selected and restricted to ensure a uniform and unquestioning adherence to officers' interpretation of its role under the 2003 Local Government Act. He believed that the Panel was gerrymandered in several ways:-

- By gagging - under the Council's officers' rules, by addressing this Council meeting, Mr Kell said that he was debarred from membership of the Panel.
- By restriction - historically five in number, officers, Mr Kell explained, had reduced the Panel to three, only later to be persuaded to four by a Councillor's intervention.
- By political favouritism - for example recruiting to the Panel a triple-hatted Liberal Democrat councillor less than six months after that individual having stood down from the District Council.
- By unethical interviewing - having one of the candidates for two Panel vacancies on the interview panel for the other candidates.
- By ageism - advertising membership of the Panel in schools to school children as an "earn and learn" opportunity but not advertising to, for example, the old and wise of the U3A or Age Concern.
- By that classic question of a candidate, "inside or outside the tent?"

Mr Kell strongly believed that this issue required addressing.

C/76 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS

The Legal, Governance and Democracy Lead Specialist (Monitoring Officer) reminded Members of the dispensation provided in the previous year by herself and the Independent Member under Part 3 of the Council's Constitution, Responsibility for Council Functions, paragraphs 2.7 and 4.12, for a four year period, relating to Agenda Item No. 6 (Report from the Independent Remuneration Panel for 2021/2022 to 2024/2025).

Councillor Robin Ashcroft, Economy, Culture and Leisure Portfolio Holder, referred to Agenda Item No.7 and the request for approval of the use of monies in relation to funding in relation to Kendal Vision. Councillor Ashcroft declared an Other Registrable Interest in this part of Item No.7 by virtue of the fact that, although not part of the Community Interest Company, he was a member of the Kendal Futures Board, having been appointed by South Lakeland District Council to that role. He explained that, whilst he had no financial interest, for the sake of transparency he would first provide an overview in relation to the matter before disconnecting from the meeting prior to discussion and a vote being taken. Councillor Susanne Long, declared an Other Registrable Interest for the same reason, although having been appointed to the Board by Kendal Town Council, and indicated that she too would disconnect at the same stage in the proceedings.

C/77 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUDED ITEMS

There were no excluded items on the agenda.

C/78 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman drew attention to his list of formal engagements, namely wreath laying at Kendal Market Place and the Kendal Parish Church Service on Remembrance Sunday.

C/79 REPORT FROM THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR 2021/2022 TO 2024/2025

Mrs Sally Parnaby, Chairman of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) was connected to the meeting via audio, having been invited by the Chairman to present the Panel's report to Council.

The IRP had recommended the following:-

- a four year term of the Members' Allowances Scheme (the Scheme) subject to any request to review as outlined in the Scheme;
- for the period from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2025 that uplift for Basic Allowances be in line with the agreed public sector staff pay award for each year of the Scheme;
- a detailed review and report by the Independent Remuneration Panel will be presented to the Council meeting in December 2024 for implementation for the next 4 years effective from 1 April 2025;
- to reduce the number of Independent Remuneration Panel members from 5 to 4 effective from 1 April 2021 and that the Chairman of the Panel be given power to exercise the casting vote if ever required; the Independent Remuneration Panel Terms of Reference are amended accordingly;
- co-optees Allowance is uplifted in line with the agreed public sector staff pay award for each year of the Scheme;
- Planning Committee Substitute Members continue to receive £250 allowance;

- to agree the draft advert and job description for recruiting IRP members;
- the IRP Panel will continue to meet at least once each year to review the index levels used in calculating the Scheme in each year. Council Members, Officers and IRP Panel members will be able to request a review of the Scheme during the Term of the Scheme if there are reasonable grounds for doing so. Reasonable grounds include changes to Members' roles, creation of additional Members' Portfolio roles or external factors such as Local Government re-organisation;
- no amendments to current Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) (however, planning substitute to continue to receive £250.00);
- other than the Group Leader's Allowance, Members should receive no more than one SRA;
- out of County Mileage Allowance to remain as part of the single travel allowance scheme as per the previous year;
- travel expenses to be in accordance with the maximum rates set by HMRC without attracting a tax charge (currently 45p per mile), this to apply to the first 150 miles of a return journey regardless of the destination and 25p per mile thereafter;
- subsistence expenses to increase by RPI as at 1 April 2021 and each year as applicable; and
- no change to Childcare/Dependant Carers' Allowance. Payments to remain at a maximum allowance of £15 per hour. The Allowance to be paid from the time the recipient leaves home to time of return.

In presenting the report, Mrs Parnaby thanked those Members who had responded to the invitation for comments for their valuable input. She informed Members that the IRP had carried out a light touch review this year, mindful of the additional demands being placed on officers and the challenges of remote and virtual working. Mrs Parnaby drew particular attention to the proposal for a four year term of the Members' Allowances Scheme which had been supported by those Members who had responded. In addition, she referred to the recommendation for the Panel to meet at least once in each year in order to review the index levels used in calculating the Scheme in each year and, in addition, for Council Members, officers and Panel members to be able to request a review of any aspect of the Scheme if there were reasonable grounds for so doing. Furthermore, Mrs Parnaby pointed out the recommendation for an uplift for basic allowances in line with the agreed public sector staff pay award for each year of the scheme during the four year period. Mrs Parnaby explained that this was in line with arrangements introduced in other local authorities and that it was felt that this constituted a more prudent and cost-effective way of reviewing the Members' Allowances Scheme moving forward. Mrs Parnaby referred to the fact that two Members of the Panel were shortly to end their four year terms and that, therefore, the Panel had reviewed and modified the recruitment and selection arrangements, in particular to try to attract applicants from across the community and especially from younger people who met the criteria.

Mrs Parnaby closed, thanking those officers involved for their time and support and, on behalf of the IRP, she asked Council to consider the recommendations contained within the report

In moving the adoption of what he felt to be a very sensible set of proposals, Councillor Giles Archibald, Leader and Promoting South Lakeland Portfolio Holder, thanked the Panel members for their service on the Panel. He expressed particular thanks to Michael Duff who was coming to the end of an eight-year term and wished him well for the future. Councillor Archibald pointed out to Members that because of the public sector pay freeze this coming year, this meant that Member allowances would also be

frozen, which corrected what had been said, he believed, by the public participant. Councillor Archibald thanked all who had participated for their involvement.

Councillor Jonathan Brook, Deputy Leader and Housing and Innovation Portfolio Holder seconded the motion.

Discussion took place during which thanks were expressed to the Panel and, in addition, to Mr Ian Kell for his address under Minute C/75 above, some feeling that there was some truth in his comments. In response to a query, the Legal, Governance and Democracy Lead Specialist (Monitoring Officer) undertook to provide a written response to the points raised by Mr Kell under C/75 above and to provide a copy of the response to Members.

Concerns were raised as regards the issue of three-Member wards, which, although it was pointed out that the Panel did not believe that this fell within its remit, had increased Members' workloads, this being the reason that Members often cited for leaving the Council. It was felt disappointing that this had not, yet again, been addressed by the Panel. Also raised was the fact that the recommendations heavily factored in the voluntary aspect and that the existing allowance did not enable a lot of residents to take up the role as a councillor in South Lakeland. Attention was also drawn to younger people and women being prevented from taking part due to, for example, having to take unpaid time out of work or having dependent children to care for. Further concerns were raised around Covid-19's impact on Members having to work from home and having to attend more and more virtual meetings in terms of heating and electricity. Attention was drawn to the potential adverse impact on Members' careers and thereby suffering financial loss and, in addition, for the need for consideration to be given to pensions for councillors.

It was suggested that consideration should be given to Members' attendance at meetings, recognition thereby being given to their commitment. It was also felt that special responsibility allowances did not bear relation to reality, for example, in relation to the many hours put in by Cabinet Members. Some Members firmly believed that a review should continue to be carried out by the Panel each year, reference being made to how busy councillors had been during the pandemic, time spent in front of computers and rooms within homes being occupied by work-related equipment.

Attention was drawn to the fact that the IRP was an independent body that took into account comments raised by councillors and of the need, therefore, for Members to ensure that they responded to requests for input during reviews. The fact that the Panel's recommendations reflected the public service pay review was welcomed.

It having been proposed by Councillor Chris Hogg to move to the vote, Councillor Brook, as seconder, thanked Members for their comments, stressing the importance of councillors being appropriately remunerated for their work and also that the level of remuneration should not act as a bar to those without income. He pointed out that the Panel did look at those issues and also that the Panel compared the level of remuneration with that of other councils. He reiterated the fact that the Panel was independent and that Members had been provided the opportunity to make representation. He suggested that in future years more Members might participate in the process.

A vote was taken by roll call and it was

RESOLVED – That

- (1) the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Members' Allowances to be adopted with effect from 1 April 2021;
- (2) approval be given to a four year term of the Members Allowances Scheme (the Scheme) subject to any request to review the Scheme as outlined in the Scheme;
- (3) for the period from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2025, it be agreed that the uplift for Basic Allowances be in line with the agreed public sector staff pay award for each year of the Scheme;
- (4) a detailed review and report by the Independent Remuneration Panel will be presented to the Council meeting in December 2024 for implementation for the next four years effective from 1 April 2025;
- (5) the number of Independent Remuneration Panel members be reduced from five to four effective from 1 April 2021 and that the Chairman of the Panel be given power to exercise the casting vote if ever required and the Independent Remuneration Panel Terms of Reference amended accordingly;
- (6) the Co-optees Allowance be uplifted in line with the agreed public sector staff pay award for each year of the Scheme;
- (7) Planning Committee Substitute Members continue to receive £250 allowance; and
- (8) the draft advert and job description for recruiting IRP members be approved.

C/80**CORPORATE FINANCIAL UPDATE QUARTER 2, 2020/21**

Councillor Andrew Jarvis, Finance and Resources Portfolio Holder presented the Corporate Financial Monitoring report which summarised the position of the Council at the end of Quarter Two of 2020/21. He reminded Members that the financial reports were more complicated than usual this year due to the by the Covid-19 crisis and the amendments that were made to the budget earlier in the year.

Councillor Jarvis focussed first on the latest view of the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's budget drawing attention to a net cost to the Council of £1.67m and although higher than initially expected, the increase would be more than offset by the 75% compensation for lost income. He further referred to the fact that since preparation of the report, a combination of additional grants and strong car-parking income had further improved the outlook and, consequently, the cost of Covid-19 for this year presented to Cabinet in the last version of the Medium Term Financial Plan was closer to £1.3m.

Councillor Jarvis informed Members as regards the "business as usual" performance of the Council and a forecast overspend on this year's activities of approximately £216,000, with a further £75,000 to be carried forward to next year. He provided details regarding specific requests in respect of the revenue budget. The report also provided an update on the Capital Programme, the full year budget for capital for 2020/21 being a little over £22m. Councillor Jarvis explained how the pandemic had impacted on many of the projects being worked on, resulting at the end of Quarter 2 in just under £2m in capital being spent. Capital expenditure had, therefore, been

reviewed for the remainder of the year, with a proposal for just over £10m to be reprofiled. He stressed, however, that at this stage no capital expenditure had been cancelled although projects' timing and feasibility would need to be further reviewed in the light of Covid-19 and he expected to provide more information on this during the Medium Term Financial Plan cycle.

Councillor Jarvis referred to Sundry Debts, the report highlighting that collection of Council Tax, Business Rates and sundry debts was running well below last year. Until recently, enforcement of recovery had not been possible due to the closure of the courts. The Council was also very aware of individual and corporate difficulties due to lockdowns. A recovery specialist had recently been employed and the Council was trying to approach this issue in a very sensitive manner. However, Councillor Jarvis pointed out that the Council had a duty to all tax payers and had to ensure that those who could pay did so. He drew attention to help on offer through the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the related hardship scheme. Importantly, he explained that any deficit on Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates would not hit this year's budget, but would exacerbate the financial situation in future years.

Councillor Jarvis acknowledged that the Council's staff were under great pressures at the moment with the Covid-19 crisis and a huge workload. He was particularly grateful to the Finance Team for the work being done to continue to ensure proper running of processes and to provide timely information on the financial position of the Council.

Councillor Jarvis moved the recommendations contained within the report and was seconded by Councillor Giles Archibald, Leader and Promoting South Lakeland Portfolio Holder.

Councillor Robin Ashcroft, Economy, Culture and Leisure Portfolio Holder, prior to commencement of the debate, provided Members with an overview in relation to regarding Kendal Vision funding towards the development and delivery of agreed activities for which had been discussed by Cabinet on 8 December 2020 at CEX/04. He drew attention to the significant challenges faced by the Town as a result of an increase in online shopping and decline in high street retail, also exacerbated to the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, he pointed out the challenge as a result of the aging population in South Lakeland and the need to attract young people to live and work in the area. Councillor Ashcroft felt that there was an opportunity for positive change, the Council and the Kendal Futures Community Interest Company, in collaboration with local stakeholders and community groups, having developed an ambitious vision and strategy to transform Kendal.

In response to a Point of Order raised by Councillor Archibald who felt that Councillor Archibald, in his role as portfolio holder, should remain connected to the meeting during discussion, the Legal, Governance and Democracy Lead Specialist (Monitoring Officer) explained that she had, prior to the meeting, discussed the matter with both Councillor Ashcroft and Councillor Susanne Long, who both shared the view that they did not wish to potentially influence the debate by remaining in the meeting.

Note – At this point in the proceedings, Councillors Ashcroft and Long disconnected from the meeting for the remainder of the discussion and voting on the item, for the reason outlined within C/76 above.

In response to a query regarding variances and the £212,000 adjustment following the audit of Housing Benefit Subsidy Claims for 2017/18 and 2018/19 to be offset by use of reserves, Councillor Jarvis explained that these minor adjustments related to prior year adjustments and were made each year and by all councils. The problem was that they

had been taken through the accounts in the wrong manner in the prior two years and then discovered during the audit process this year. Rather than correct last year's accounts, they had been adjusted in this year's. The balance sheet was correct but there had been a need to put them through the revenue account. The figures had nothing to do with current issues. In response to a further query as to whether there was likely to be an additional burden on reserves into the future, Councillor Jarvis explained that 2019/20 would be the same as each year, with some degree of truing up at the end of the year. The Finance Lead Specialist (Section 151 Officer) expanded, explaining that the Subsidy Claim was currently being audited and that there would be some final figures, probably by January 2021 which would be reported to the Audit Committee in either February or April. She explained that the overall adjustment was on two claims that together covered £33m and was a relatively small adjustment in terms of the total amount. She further informed Members that these adjustments were becoming smaller each year, with more specialist staff now being dedicated to the process.

Note – At this stage in the proceedings, Councillor Janette Jenkinson, seeking advice from the Legal, Governance and Democracy Lead Specialist (Monitoring Officer), declared an Other Registrable Interest by virtue of being a Trustee of the Coronation Hall. Whilst she had no financial interest, for the sake of transparency, she would disconnect from the meeting following raising a question on reprofiling of the Capital Programme in relation to the Hall.

Attention was drawn to Capital Programme reprofiling and the sum of £39,900 shown for Coronation Hall queried. Attention was drawn to the fact that a sum of around £70,000 had been left over following Ulverston Town Council having moved offices, that money having been promised for refurbishments at the Coronation Hall. Councillor Jarvis undertook to ensure that a written response was provided by officers and copied to all Members.

Note – Councillor Jenkinson disconnected from the meeting for the remainder of the discussion and voting on the item, for the reason outlined above.

The report was welcomed and support expressed in particular for the proposals for Kendal Town Centre which, it was felt, were vital in terms of the wider economy of the area. Reference was made to the need to build back following Covid-19 and to the golden age of playgrounds within South Lakeland and of their importance during the pandemic. Pride was expressed with regard to the hard work of officers during the pandemic, assisting individuals and businesses. The need for the Government to properly fund councils in the north of the country was stressed, particularly in the light of Covid-19.

Councillor Archibald, as seconder for the proposals, referred to an earlier question and explained that there was still an amount of £79,800 in the budget for the Coronation Hall alterations and that the £39,000 was simply regarding reprofiling. He referred to the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's finances, however, explained that the Authority was in a fairly good position due to the excellent work which had been carried out by officers and portfolio holders. Although there would be a budget gap, Councillor Archibald remained confident that this would be filled. He made particular reference to infrastructure projects and explained that the Council was determined, where possible, to push ahead with ambitious projects such as Ulverston Leisure Centre, Grange Promenade and Lido, enhanced flood defences, Swarthmoor Roundabout and Disability Toilets. The Council still had to push ahead with plans to regenerate, maintain and update its assets. He thanked Councillor Jarvis and officers for their work on the report.

No Member having raised concern when asked by the Chairman, it was

RESOLVED – That

- (1) the contents of the report and Appendices 1 to 4 be noted;
- (2) the re-profiling of the Capital Programme as shown in section 3.2.3 of the report and Appendix 3 to the report be approved; and
- (3) further to Cabinet's decision on 8 December 2020, the following be approved:-
 - (a) the carry forward of unspent estimates, as set out in section 3.1.2 of the report and Appendix 5 to the report;
 - (b) the virement of £92,800 from the Community Housing Fund in section 3.1.3; and
 - (c) the use of £150,000 from the NNDR Pooling Reserve, £135,294 from the Kendal Town Centre Masterplan and up to £246,000 of Section 106 funding, as set out in section 3.1.4.

C/81

REQUEST FOR AUTHORISED ABSENCE FROM COUNCIL AND COUNCIL COMMITTEE MEETINGS – COUNCILLOR D KHAN

Councillor Philip Dixon, Customer and Commercial Services and People Portfolio Holder, asked Members to support a request from Councillor Dave Khan for his absence from Council and committee meetings in accordance with Section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 due to having to care for a family member who was unwell. Councillor Dixon informed Members that Councillor Robin Ashcroft, also a District Ward Member for Grange, had undertaken to take on board Councillor Khan's work, as necessary. In addition, Council Dixon explained that it was Councillor Khan's wish for his Members allowance during this time to be added to the Personal Financial Resilience Reserve as per other allowances which were not taken up by Members.

Councillor Dixon having moved the proposal was seconded by Councillor Helen Irving. Councillor Ashcroft confirmed that he would be able to deal with any matters raised by residents in the Grange Ward. Whilst attention was drawn to the fact that Grange was a three Member Ward now being run by a one single councillor, warm support was expressed for the proposal and for Councillor Khan and his family.

No Member having raised concern when asked by the Chairman, it was

RESOLVED – That, in accordance with Section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, Councillor Dave Khan's absence from Council and committee meetings until and including 27 July 2021, for the reasons set out in the report, be authorised.

C/82**LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS AND CABINET QUESTION TIME, INCLUDING THE COMPOSITE REPORT OF THE CABINET (1 HOUR MAXIMUM)**

Councillor Giles Archibald, Leader and Promoting South Lakeland Portfolio Holder, presented the Cabinet Members' Executive Reports.

Councillor Archibald informed Members that he had, earlier in the day, addressed the Council's staff, on behalf of all Members expressing appreciation for the work that they had carried out during 2020 during the pandemic. Staff had continued to empty the bins, keep the streets clean and deliver on our normal services. Officers had paid out thousands of grants, helped the vulnerable, helped businesses at risk, reorganised rates, established virtual working, established a marshal program, had been an intergral part of the response to the pandemic and, under extreme pressure, had delivered the Council's part of track and trace. On top of all this, they had responded magnificently to the challenge thrown at the Council by the desire of some to choose now as a time for local authority reorganisation. Councillor Archibald thanked the Chairman for his patient guidance of the Council through a new way of meeting and the staff that had worked with him to make this happen. Councillor Archibald also wished to thank all Members, the Council having pulled together in these difficult times. The opposition leaders had fully participated in briefings, asked constructive questions and had been supportive of the pandemic response. Councillor Archibald was most grateful for this collaborative effort.

Councillor Archibald took the opportunity to briefly update Council on the possible reorganisation. The business case for the Bay had been submitted on 9 December, co-sponsored by Barrow Borough and Lancaster City councils. It had been voted through by the three councils by a majority of 110 to eight, with seven abstentions. Business cases for three other structures had also been submitted to Government. On Friday, a request had been received from the Minister to meet with him on Monday to present the proposal. The Leader and his fellow leaders had been able to present to him the main features of the proposal. The Minister had given very little away other than to say that he felt that there would probably be an indication in February as to which proposals would go forward for consultation.

Councillor Archibald turned to Covid-19 and asked everyone to take care over Christmas, stressing that the virus was still rampant. He informed Members that it was planned that there would be at least three vaccination centres in the District. Officers were working with the authorities to ensure as efficient roll out of vaccinations as possible. The pandemic had made these very difficult times. The Council's job was to support the Government, support the County and provide local leadership out of this crisis. Members and officers had done so, and this was terrific.

Councillor Archibald referred to the forthcoming new challenge of Brexit and the need to be prepared for a no deal outcome from the negotiations. Ministers have asked the Council to be prepared and to be available over the new year to meet any consequences.

Councillor Archibald finally, made reference to Storm Desmond, stressing the fact that officers remained vigilant, monitoring the situation very closely.

Councillor Archibald wished everyone a wonderful and well-deserved Christmas break.

Questions were then put in relation to the content of the Executive Reports.

Councillor Mark Wilson referring to Covid-19 asked Councillor Archibald if he would be able to resume the joint group leader meetings on the response to Covid-19 and outbreaks and, in particular, asked him to advise on the situation with regard to the nightingale arrangements at the Kendal Leisure Centre which, he believed, had been mothballed.

Councillor Archibald responded, saying that he would be happy to meet with group leaders at any time. Councillor Archibald undertook to provide a written response to the question on the nightingale hospital arrangements.

Councillor Wilson further asked what lead the Council could provide in supporting residents in knowing where South Lakeland was in terms of tiers.

Councillor Archibald explained that these were determined by Central Government. It was the Council's job to support the Government, the Director of Public Health and the County Council, part of this being to assist in communication.

Councillor Roger Bingham referred to the report of the Economy, Culture and Leisure Portfolio Holder, Councillor Robin Ashcroft's report, wishing to comment on the section on heritage, events, listed buildings and built environment in relation to Burton-in-Kendal. He wished to thank colleagues for the work carried out in Burton which had, initially, somewhat offended some local residents. However, the work carried out had now been welcomed, with work having been carried out on two or three derelict buildings in the village and the Market Square, as well as a cottage lower down the street having been refurbished. Above all, Councillor Bingham was delighted that the Royal Hotel, a superb Georgian building, had been restored, part of which would hopefully be used for a pub, with some room for social or affordable housing behind.

Councillor Ashcroft thanked Councillor Bingham for his gracious comments, also pleased at the potential for the Royal Hotel to return to being a pub at some stage.

Councillor Matt Severn, also referring to Covid-19, asked Councillor Archibald how the Council could best promote the importance and safety of the vaccine and combat any myths or rumours from those opposed to it. Councillor Severn also asked whether it was known if the Government, upon reviewing the three tier system, would look at sticking with county-wide reviews or look at separate districts, as it had started to do in Hertfordshire and Essex.

Councillor Archibald was keen for the Council to be part of the communication around the importance of the vaccine. He pointed out, however, the need to co-ordinate any communication with the county and the national communication. He felt it to be of great importance for the Council to do all possible to emphasise the importance of the vaccine and welcomed any ideas on how to connect with people in this regard.

In accordance with paragraphs 10.2 and 10.3 of the Council's Rules of Procedure, the following written questions had been submitted to the meeting:-

From Councillor Matt Severn to Councillor Robin Ashcroft, Economy, Culture and Leisure Portfolio Holder - *What he feels the risks are to businesses in South Lakeland from a No Deal Brexit; and even if there is a trade deal with the European Union what extra obstacles may be caused if a deal is deficient in terms of access or regulations.*

Councillor Ashcroft responded, stressing that this was a serious situation.

Councillor Ashcroft referred to the current situation, to the degree of uncertainty and a loss in business confidence. Businesses did not know what to expect or was what expected from them. He drew attention to the risk of tariffs, the disconnect between negotiations and likely outcomes. All this on top of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Councillor Ashcroft referred to the future and the potential of a No Deal Brexit, which would have very serious consequences, with significant loss of economic activity, income and jobs over the short and, possibly, medium term, and who knew what could happen in the long term? He said that, although there was some optimism with regard to a potential trade deal, again, there was a degree of uncertainty in this regard.

Councillor Ashcroft provided a breakdown on the sectors. South Lakeland was heavily dependent on the visitor economy which was crucial to the area, generating £1.3b on an annual basis. He referred to the overseas market which could result in people holidaying within the UK. He drew attention to issues around the supply chain and the survival of companies and to concerns around the labour supply and salary limits set by HMG which was not sustainable by the current visitor economy model. There was no ready pool of labour in South Lakeland. Therefore, there would be a very different model for the visitor economy.

This linked in to the farming sector. The character of the landscape in South Lakeland was very much a managed landscape. If the farming sector was not configured in a way to steward that landscape, this could have a very serious impact, as the Lake District would not look like people expected it to. There could be a very different farming model, possibly with potential benefits from the Environmental Land Management scheme, however, this involved a ten year timescale. The damage could be done within this time.

Councillor Ashcroft talked about retail and supply, referring to possible shortages in the short term or beyond. This would have an impact not only on market confidence but also on the confidence of those who were buying, who were also trying to save.

Councillor Ashcroft turned to engineering and hi tech and concerns with regard to loss of orders, delays, the supply chain, exporting and the effect on companies' profitability. He referred to business support and drew attention to the Chamber of Commerce's Website which contained a lot of helpful information. Councillor Ashcroft, however, explained that the service industry appeared to be doing well due to having to advise worried companies, those companies having to pay for that advice. He further drew attention to concerns over the impact on the housing market, which was related to the service industry.

Councillor Ashcroft summarised, pointing out the risk of disassociation from the world's largest trading block in just over two weeks' time. He questioned the form of the future relationship and whether it could be replaced if a deal was not brought together. What he did know was that there would be a massive shock to the economy and this was a serious situation.

Councillor Severn asked a supplementary question, first drawing attention to the Government having had the option to delay negotiations for up to two years, that option having passed in July 2020. He asked Councillor Ashcroft whether he agreed that the Government should be called to ask to request an extension on the implementation period to assist businesses to prepare, given everything they had had to deal with over the last nine months.

Councillor Ashcroft agreed.

From Councillor Doug Rathbone to Councillor Jonathan Brook, Deputy Leader and Housing and Innovation Portfolio Holder - *Does the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Innovation think that the Customer Connect programme has helped the Council respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and what further system enhancements can we expect to see implemented over the coming months?*

Councillor Brook responded, saying that Customer Connect had underpinned the Council's ability to respond and, although most of the Programme had been implemented, there were still some further significant enhancements to be delivered.

The Customer Connect Programme had been of critical importance in enabling the Council to respond efficiently and effectively to the many challenges raised by the Covid-19 Pandemic. It had enabled improved access to services 24/7 and restructured the entire organisation to create a more flexible customer focussed workforce. This had meant that many staff and all Councillors had been able to work remotely and continue to deliver services, conduct virtual meetings and respond to the needs of residents in a timely manner.

The Council, with the help of the hard work and dedication of Council staff, had been able to continue to deliver services such as waste recycling collections, the payment of benefits, housing the homeless, the processing of planning applications as well as additional tasks including the administering of millions of pounds of grants to businesses affected by the lockdown.

In respect of these grants, Councillor Brook said that it was worthwhile considering the additional workload involved and how the Customer Connect technology had helped deliver a tremendous and vital outcome for local businesses and the local economy.

The new digital platform had been used to administer the Covid-19 business support grants. Earlier in the year, the small business grant application form had gone live, followed by the discretionary grant application. The online application process had been digitised, meaning that administering and approving the grants was much more efficient. The online process had supported the Council in granting £65.6m to some 5,828 businesses.

Then, in the previous month, the local restrictions support grant and the additional restrictions grant had also gone live, to support businesses affected by the second national lock down. These processes had been integrated with the customer account functionality, which had gone live in May 2020.

The application process had been built, utilising pre-populated data, so that customers could apply using information from their previous grant application submitted in the first lock down. This had made the application process much simpler and had again reduced the resources needed to process the applications. To date the Council has approved 3,270 local restrictions support grants (for closed businesses) amounting to £4.8m and 324 additional restrictions grants amounting to £450k.

A spin off of this, had been a significant increase in the number of customers registering for My Account functionality. My Account allowed people to apply for services and report issues online.

Now, in terms of further enhancements, Councillor Brook informed Members that there were two key developments for the beginning of the forthcoming year. The first was the integration of our customer account with the Capita Revenue and Benefits system. This

would allow customers to access details of their Council Tax, non-domestic rates and benefit claims, online; to receive documents electronically and look at payment details online; and to access online forms to complete a range of the most frequent transactions.

The Council was also looking to introduce online payments for transactions such as bulky waste and temporary event notices. These improvements, Councillor Brook explained, would deliver further efficiencies and enhance levels of customer service.

From Councillor Vicky Hughes to Councillor Suzie Pye, Health and Financial Resilience Portfolio Holder - *Cllr Pye could you possibly give us an update on the winter welfare grant, and in what capacity local councillors can assist getting this much needed extra funding to people in our community.*

Councillor Pye responded, informing Members that, on 8 November the DWP had announced a package of measures to provide support to children, families, and the most vulnerable over the winter. Upper tier local authorities had been allocated money to disburse grants for food and utilities and the scheme was to run until 31 March 2021.

The guidance set out that 80% of grants were to be disbursed to households with children and 20% to vulnerable adult households. At least 80% of grants had to be related to food and utilities. There was no means testing requirement from the DWP. Local authorities had full flexibility to design local schemes to disburse the grants.

Cumbria County Council was taking the lead in South Lakeland, being the upper tier authority. They had established the following set of schemes:-

- Free School Meal vouchers over the Christmas holidays and February half term: all children on a free school meal would receive a voucher to cover the holiday periods.
- Families would be able to benefit from £100 energy vouchers up until 31 March.

This project would work by families being signposted or receiving referrals from Citizens Advice advisers, DWP job advisers, the County Council's Service Centre and Cumbria's local Covid-19 test and trace team.

The aim was to reach families that might not be eligible for Free School Meals, including those going onto Universal Credit for the first time and households that have to self-isolate but do not qualify for the £500 payment.

- A discretionary fund had been set up to support Children's Social Care to provide grants to care leavers and young adults with SEND over the winter period.

County Council officers were keen to work with District colleagues to look at how best to allocate funds to support activity to meet the criteria. The District Council had been engaging with the County Council, and all the other partners represented in the South Lakeland Community Resilience Group, to identify emerging trends in communities, and use an evidence-based approach to how and where funds are spent.

16 food initiatives had now set up across South Lakeland, all with enough provision and equipment to get through at least the winter and, in some cases, the whole of the coming year. Most food hubs were also in the throes of preparing Christmas hampers for families with children in receipt of free school meals. There were Christmas craft

sets being distributed to families, as well as many other localised projects which had been set up by those members of the community who were best placed to know where to direct the help, but funded by the Winter Wellness Grants. It was a great demonstration of local authorities working together with community projects in order to best reach the residents who needed it.

Councillor Pye explained what local ward members could do, as the eyes and ears of the Council and the community. If there was a need that was not being met, then Members could communicate that through the appropriate channels. If there was a community project in need of guidance, there might well be a way through in which Members could help with. Councillor Pye suggested that the best way of doing this was by emailing customer.services@southlakeland.gov.uk to get through to the Customer and Locality Services Team. Members could also give out the 0800 emergency Covid-19 number to any individual who might be in crisis - 0800 783 1966. Those individuals would then be triaged through the central hub, and would be matched with the most appropriate local government department or third sector organisation. Councillor Pye, in closing, offered to recirculate to Members an online directory which contained localised information on food initiatives, financial help, mental health and wellbeing organisations, etc.

The written questions been put and answered, the following verbal question was put:-

Councillor Kevin Lancaster wished to follow up on Councillor Severn's question to Councillor Ashcroft, particularly with regard to the livestock sector which was so important in this District. He first explained that he did not share Councillor Ashcroft's confidence in the Environmental Land Management scheme, of the opinion that it had fundamental flaws. He believed that the Council should consider lobbying Government in this regard, as there were potential problems associated with the scheme. Councillor Lancaster drew attention to the fact that livestock dealers in the red meat sector invested millions of pounds in livestock produced in this District. Store lambs were up 20% on the previous year and prime cattle making more than ever. There certainly seems to be a strong appetite not heard of within the national media. Councillor Lancaster asked if the Council recognised this fact and whether it would work with that sector moving forward.

Councillor Ashcroft explained that he was unsure with regard to the Environmental Land Management Scheme and that it was the National Farmers' Union that had drawn attention to some good points although also drawing attention to the long timescale. Councillor Ashcroft said that he would be happy to take on board Councillor Lancaster's comments and would continue that conversation with the National Farmers' Union.

Councillor Lancaster hoped that the Council would support the livestock dealers and publicise the issue. He welcomed Councillor Ashcroft's comments and further stressed the need to address some of the dangerous problems associated with the Environmental Land Management scheme.

Councillor Dyan Jones, Climate Emergency and Localism Portfolio Holder offered to provide Members with information regarding her area of work in writing.

C/83

MINUTES OF MEETINGS

No comments or questions had been received in respect of the minutes of committee meetings held between 13 July and 9 October 2020.

C/84 QUESTIONS TO CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL OR CHAIRMAN OF ANY COMMITTEE OR SUB-COMMITTEE

No questions had been received under Rule 10.6 of the Council's Rules of Procedure.

C/85 URGENT DECISIONS

No Member having raised concern when asked by the Chairman, it was

RESOLVED – That the details relating to an urgent Executive Decision taken since the last ordinary meeting of Council on 6 October 2020, namely CEX/79 (Local Government Reform (Building a Case for Change)) be received.

C/86 EMERGENCY DELEGATED EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

No Member having raised concern when asked by the Chairman, it was

RESOLVED – That the following Emergency Delegated Executive Decisions taken by the Chief Executive, in accordance with the Leaders decision noted by Cabinet at CEX/104 (2019/20), be noted:-

- (1) 010 09-10-20 Test and Trace Support Payment Schemes; and
- (2) 011 13-11-20 Local Restrictions Support Grants (Closed).

The meeting ended at 8.50 p.m.