

MINUTES
of a meeting of the Governance Committee
11 August 2020
(11:00-12:15)

Meeting held by video conference call

Present:

Anne-Marie Dean, Chairman
Ian Buckmaster, Company Secretary
Bev Markham, Community Support Officer
Carole Howard, Office Administrator (for part of meeting)

Jenny Gregory, Dawn Ladbrook and Val Perry, Members

1 Welcome

The Chairman welcomed all participants to the video conference. Apologies were received for the absence of Carol Dennis and Di Old.

2 Declarations of interest

Anne-Marie Dean, Ian Buckmaster, Bev Markham and Carole Howard each declared an interest in relation to the matter referred to in minute 5 following.

There were no other declarations

3 Minutes of meeting held 14 July 2020

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a correct record and the Chairman was authorised to sign them in due course.

Arising from minute 12, concerning a GP practice Upminster, it was noted that the CCG and CQC had recently announced that the practice had been placed in special measures and were taking action to rectify the shortcomings that had been identified and to protect patients.

Arising from minute 13, Use of video conferencing for medical consultations, Mrs Ladbrook reported that the issue had been discussed at a recent meeting of the Havering Safeguarding Adults Board and identified as a risk to be considered.

4 Finance report

The report for July was received.

There were no financial matters to which attention needed to be drawn. The Committee noted that expenditure for the first four months of this financial year had been running lower than at any time since 2013. It was some £1,900 lower than in the same period last year, and £1,800 less than the five-yearly average, even though some (modest) additional expenditure had been incurred in dealing with the consequences of the Covid-19 lockdown.

It was too early in the year to forecast with any certainty the likely end-of-year surplus, but current indications were that (disregarding any potential income) it could be of the order of £5,000.

It was noted that expenditure relating specifically to the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic would be identified within the accounts and be reported on to future meetings.

5 Additional personal expenditure incurred in consequence of the Covid-19 lockdown

Note: Anne-Marie Dean, Ian Buckmaster, Bev Markham and Carole Howard, having declared interests in relation to this matter, did not take part in the vote on it.

The unprecedented requirement to work from home had largely been successful, although some additional personal expenditure has been incurred by individual members of staff to support their ability to work from home.

A subscription had been taken out with Zoom to enable video conference meetings, and additional facilities had been purchased for the landline telephone service, to enable conference calling (to some extent overtaken by Zoom but retained as a stand-by facility) and for calls to be made from mobile phones through the office landline system, enabling users to conceal their personal numbers, appearing to be using the office number (see also minute 6 following).

It had been necessary for staff to purchase additional equipment for their personal comfort and to improve their internet access. It was proposed therefore to offer staff some financial support for those additional purchases. For tax reasons, it would not be possible to make “grants” but, rather, to make expenses payment for equipment essential for homeworking of up to £150, to be supported by receipts, against additional purchases of office-related equipment such as chairs or IT equipment. To qualify, the equipment claimed for would have to have been purchased since lockdown began on 23 March.

The Committee APPROVED that staff may claim up to £150 as expenses for the purchase of essential equipment necessary for the better performance of their duties while working from home because of the Covid-19 lockdown.

6 Returning to the office – risk assessment

It remained the intention for staff to return to the office on 1 September, although this might need to be delayed if for any reason a “local lockdown” was imposed that prevented that; and, in any event, it is unlikely that full use of the office would resume for some time, with staff working from home as well as in the office for the foreseeable future.

The owners of Queens Court, RMS, had undertaken a risk assessment for the building as a whole and staff and volunteers were obliged to comply with it. The risk assessment covered the building, including the stairways, lifts and corridors, but it was up to individual tenants to risk assess their own offices.

It was proposed to retain as much of the current layout of the office as possible, adjusting it to maintain social distancing. Considering the size of the room and the accommodation within it, it had been assessed that the maximum number of people that could be accommodated in it at any time was 6, although usually there would be fewer than that.

Appropriate quantities of hand sanitiser, cleaning materials and disinfectant would be obtained and maintained. Unless government advice changed, it would not be necessary to provide facemasks or other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) but if individuals wished to wear their own PPE while in the office, their right to do so would of course be respected.

Action to update the office phone system had been taken, including the provision of three handset (one for each member of staff) and, in addition to conference calling, a facility had been obtained to enable authorised users to access the landline phone remotely to make calls using the office system; this gave added security for staff and members using their private phones for Healthwatch.

7 Care homes and Covid-19 - survey

The proposed survey video conference had gone ahead on 28 July but only one relative/friend had participated. Despite that, the event was considered successful; several issues had been raised that were being pursued with the appropriate bodies.

It was now proposed to hold a further video conference on Tuesday 8 September with another later in that month, and in addition an online survey had been set up. Invitations to participate in either the video conference or the

online survey, or both, would shortly be issued. The July conference had been referred to in the Council's Carers Newsletter.

8 Programme of engagement work for ELCA

The East London Commissioning Alliance (the area's CCGs operating together as a shadow unified CCG) have commissioned the eight Healthwatches in East London, including Havering, to "undertake a programme of work to help us understand the impact Covid-19 has had on our services, how this has affected patients and, most importantly, how we can improve". The fee for this work would be £49,500, to be shared across the Healthwatches, dependent upon their individual input to the programme. Potentially, the income from this would be around £4,500.

More details of the programme would be discussed as they became clear.

9 Approval of Project Plans

The Committee approved the following draft Project Plans:

- Survey of users of home care support (requested by Havering Council)
- Working with Havering Council's Area Co-ordinators (the Committee noted that arrangements had been made for the current two co-ordinators to meet Healthwatch members at a forthcoming video conference)

The Committee also approved an updated version of the Project Plan for the survey of the views of Care Home residents' friends and families.

10 Next meeting

The next scheduled meeting was due on Tuesday, 8 September 2020. As the office would not be reopening until 1 September and work would be required to ensure that it complied with the risk assessment referred to in minute 6 above, the Committee agreed to postpone it to the following Tuesday, 15 September.

Chairman