

# Community Services Cabinet Committee

Tuesday, 05 March 2019

7:30pm

## Present:

Cllr Sandra Garside (Chair)  
Cllr Greta Goatley (Vice-Chair)

Cllrs: Rob Halpin  
Gary Harding (Sub)  
Jordan Meade  
Shane Mochrie-Cox  
Brian Sangha  
Peter Scollard

Simon Hookway	Assistant Director (Communities)
Anita Tysoe	Service Manager (Customer & Theatre Services)
Jackie Denton	Customer Services Manager
Adrian Hickmott	Leisure & Resilience Manager
Liz Read	Operational Manager, The Gr@nd
Kirsty Gaunt	Community Engagement Officer
Ben Clarke	Committee & Scrutiny Assistant (Minutes)

## 61. Apologies

An apology of absence was received from Cllr Gurjit Bains.

## 62. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on Thursday, 07 February 2019 were signed by the Chair.

## 63. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox declared a non-pecuniary interest for item 5 as he works with KCC Preventative Services.

## 64. The Gr@nd

The Committee received a presentation from the Operational Manager, The Gr@nd on the services the Gr@nd operates within the Borough (please see supplementary).

Following the conclusion of the presentation, the Operational Manager, The Gr@nd fielded questions and comments from the Committee, explaining that:

- Children of all ages, sexes, genders, disabilities and background were welcome to join any of the Gr@nd activities that were offered. There are no barriers in place to stop anyone from joining any of the safe space activities either. The Gr@nd encouraged active participation from every group of people and works with groups

that aren't represented to determine what they require to make the sessions viable to them

- Children that are at risk are made to feel comfortable with the Gr@nd so that they can talk to a member of staff if they feel they are at serious risk of anything; they would be able to go to the Gr@nd and seek help for whatever is troubling them. At the Safe Space disco, security is always hired for the night so that the children attending feel safe around each other and can express themselves without fear of being attacked
- The Gr@nd monitors young children for as long as possible in order to sustain the healthy relationship that is created with them; a system called eStart is used which records the progress made in sessions with young people. It records things such as what was spoken about and if there were any positive/negative outcomes. There is also an accredited process which looks at giving young people accredited qualifications such as a Food Hygiene Certificate which can be used to help them find employment in the future. The Gr@nd also provides young people with help completing their CV's and searching for their future careers as many young people don't know what they wish to do. The funding contract with KCC finishes in 2021
- RBLI is an organisation that supports people in getting back to work
- The lifestyles choice group is designed for motivated adults who desire to change but do not know how to go about it; the group is about helping people make small changes to their life in order to maintain a healthier lifestyle. Lifestyle choices aren't preached at young people and are primarily only for those who seek out additional help to change their lifestyle
- The Langa Seva group session is a weekly event organised by the Sikh Temple; every Tuesday they make food in the Langa (the kitchen in the Temple) and bring it to the Gr@nd to distribute to people in need
- No alcohol is allowed at the safe space disco events as it covers the ages 14-19; everyone attending the event should feel safe so any people displaying inappropriate behaviour would be spoken to or asked to leave
- With regard to the questions posed in the presentation such as 'What's life like for a 19 year old'; all of the questions were created by young people who felt that those were the topics that other young people should be asked about

Concern was raised by a Member about the air quality in Gravesham as Gravesham didn't receive a positive response from the EDC when a recommendation was sent to them by the Committee last year. The Operational Manager, The Gr@nd was asked about the Gr@nds role in air quality and what young people could do to help:

- The Gr@nd already works with the communities in Northfleet and the Youth Club there in partnership with EDC to make them all aware of what is happening around the development and make sure everyone is engaged as one community
- A healthy school programme is also being run for EDC through the Gr@nd; they have specific schools they wanted to target: Cherry Orchard which is a new primary school, Lawn Primary School and St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
- The clean air aspirations of the Council may be able to be worked into the Healthy School Programme in the future
- The EDC has also been working with the Gr@nd to promote 'Edible Ebbsfleet', mental health awareness and a commitment to make the EDC a healthy workplace

The Committee thanked Liz Read for an information presentation and asked that thanks been given to the Gr@nd for all the work that they do within Gravesham.

## 65. Customer Service Update and Customer Engagement

The Committee was informed of the service provided by Customer Services and given information on how the council dealt with customer engagement.

The Customer Services Manager explained to the Committee that following a discussion at the last Community Services Cabinet Committee on 26 November 2018 it was proposed that a report be produced looking at how the council ensures it is providing customer satisfaction.

The Community Involvement Officer gave a brief update to the Committee on the surveys that had been carried out in the Gateway. The surveys were filled out over two weeks by customers at the Gateway and in total, 63 were given back with detailed information regarding their age, ethnicity, language competency and disabilities etc. That information was collated with information from the Census, other customers who had contacted the Customer Services Team by telephone and digital data, to produce the report; a breakdown of the figures was included at appendix 4.

The Customer Services Manager informed Members of the different types of contact the Customer Services Team operated, their varied work across the departments and face to face contact versus digital self-help:

- Telephone Contact Centre – Customer Services Officers man the contact centre and take a range of inquires including taking phone calls from a number of departments; the team took calls related to Parking, Housing Allocation, Waste Management and Council Tax etc
- By taking calls for other departments it freed up officer time so that they could focus more on their work; if a member of the public needed to speak to an officer urgently then the Custer Services Team would be able to get into contact with a relevant officer
- The officers also dealt with general email inquiries and operated a web based chat that helped customers get directed to the Council webs pages that they needed (i.e. paying their Council Tax) and it is able to be accessed as soon as the user clicks on the Council website
- Gravesham Gateway – The Gateway has Customer Service Officers that deal with face to face inquiries; the public have ten minute appointments with an officer. The majority of the time the enquiry could have been handled over the phone or through an online form but some customers prefer the face to face contact
- The Gateway has numerous organisations situated there such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and Victim Support. The Customer Service Officers can direct a member of the public to these partner services at any point during the day via the different forms of contact available
- A Customer Service Officer is situated at the Market Tourist information desk to provide assistance Thursday to Sunday.
- Online contact is by far the cheaper option for the Council and Gravesham will continue to offer more web based contact options and make more forms available online to keep up with the digital movement. However, Gravesham will always have officers available to help those who require additional help including face to face and on the telephone. Having increased online options means that the officers are more freely available to help those who require a face to face contact or help filling out a form etc

- The automated telephone system in place is quite old and has caused several minor issues for customers trying to get through to the right department; because of that the Council is planning to install a new telephony system in a few months' time

Praise was given by a Member for the commendable work the Customer Services Team carried out and for the many skills that they possessed especially in dealing with unruly customers; the training that they undertook was excellent. However, he noted that reviewing the figures in the report revealed that it was clear residents in Gravesham still primarily preferred talking to an officer face to face and he questioned whether Gravesham was pushing new technology too hard against what the resident's actually desired.

The Customer Services Manager admitted that Gravesham had seen a fall in the webchat figures but explained that the reason for that was that the webchats were mainly used to direct customers to web pages rather than providing detailed information; if they needed more complex information they would be encouraged to discuss it via telephone. The lower figures were a positive sign as it meant that customers were using the web pages correctly themselves.

The Service Manager (Customer & Theatre Services) advised that in general the Council identified that younger people wanted to complete their transactions online but the Customer Services Team were very conscious that there was a broad spectrum of people who all had different requirements. The team will always take into account the diversity of resident's and will tailor services to their needs including always having officers ready to talk to customers face to face in the Civic Centre.

Officers fielded further questions and comments from the Committee, explaining that:

- The Customer Services front desk is staffed by various members of the team in shifts; each team would work one morning shift (8:30am to 1:00pm) and then another team would take over for the remainder of the working day
- The percentage of calls fluxes all year round depending on what various departments are working on; for example due to Planning only taking calls at certain time slots during the day it increased the amount of calls the Customer Services team took. Other times of the year contacts were higher; such as the start of year due to Council Tax billing and always after a holiday period, usually to find out about the amended dates of waste collection. It was highlighted that the new Waste Collection service was rolled out last year which caused a significant spike in telephone calls
- With regard to recovery bailiffs, Council Tax send out numerous letters including court summons which the customer would have to ignore before any bailiffs were sent out to recover debt
- Council Tax also started running debt counselling surgeries which proved popular and there are bailiffs situated in the Gateway a couple days a week who can provide information to the public
- The website redevelopment was very beneficial to the public as well as Customer Services and all the Councils departments constantly work with the Digital team to find ways of improving their online services
- If a member of the public wanted to put a bid on a Council House they could do it through phone or online
- Over the last few years, staff turnover had increased but staff have been encouraged to develop resulting in a number of officers taking up positions in other departments across the Council. However, new recruits have taken up the vacant positions and

currently there is a diverse, very resourceful Customer Services Team operating within the Civic Centre

- The Customer Service Officers keeps in contact with departments so that everything is up to date and regular meetings are held to discuss any new procedures or issues etc

The Committee asked that thanks be noted and passed back to the Customer Services Team for all their hard work.

The Chair thanked Cllr Greta Goatley for filling in for her as Acting Chair at the previous Committee meeting and further thanked the Committee Members for their participation throughout the financial year 2018/19.

### **Close of meeting**

The meeting ended at 8:38pm.