

Community & Leisure Cabinet Committee

Tuesday, 15 September 2020

7:30pm

Present:

Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox (Chair)
Cllr Tony Rana (Vice-Chair)

Cllrs: Helen Ashenden
Ejaz Aslam
Harold Craske
Aaron Elliott
Jordan Meade
Emma Morley
Christina Rolles
Peter Scollard

Simon Hookway	Assistant Director (Communities)
Anita Tysoe	Service Manager (Customer & Theatre Services)
Kath Donald	Strategic Manager
Sean Steer	Community Safety Operations Manager
Virginie Whittaker	Town & Tourism Manager
Mandy Hare	Cultural Manager
Kirsty Gaunt	Community Involvement Officer
Ben Clarke	Committee & Scrutiny Assistant (Minutes)

45. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Gary Harding; Cllr Jordan Meade substituted.

46. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on Wednesday, 03 June 2020 were signed by the Chair.

47. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Peter Scollard declared an interest as he was a trustee on the North West Kent Community Volunteer Centre.

Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox declared an interest as he was an appointed representative to the Gr@nd and the GCLL Board.

48. Corporate Performance Report: Q1 2020-21

The Committee was presented with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the Council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter One 2020-21 (April to June 2020).

At the Chairs request, the Assistant Director (Communities) went through the report section by section:

People

1. Create stronger neighbourhoods:
2. 2. Actively enforce environmental standards:

The Assistant Director (Communities) gave the Committee a brief summary of the performance that related to the two Policy Commitments within Objective Number One: People.

The Chair advised that he met with Chief Inspector Neil Loudon and Inspector Craig West from Kent Police and they assured him that a large swathe of the reported anti-social behaviour cases were linked to Covid-19. As such, the Chair was assured that the statistics would be regrouped to show the genuine ASB cases and the ASB cases that were a direct result of Covid-19.

Concern was raised by a Member as many Councillors had received complaints from their constituents regarding the rising use of E-Scooters and mopeds which caused a hazard to the public as they were being used irresponsibly on pavements, the road and in the local parks. It was suggested that the Council and Kent Police worked together to form a strategy to deal with preventing access to places such as parks in order to stop any accidents from occurring.

The Assistant Director (Communities) agreed that the Council had seen a rise in the use of E-Scooters but the legislation was not up to date; it was actually illegal to use the E-Scooters on the highway unless they were hired from a registered company. The Chair stated that it was the responsibility of Kent Police to provide enforcement and the Assistant Director (Communities) agreed to liaise with Kent Police on the issue.

Following further questions, the Assistant Director (Communities) explained the following:

- With regard to the enforcement figure of zero for quarter one, at the start of lockdown litter enforcement was not deemed essential and the Safer Place Officers were redeployed to carry out welfare checks and deliver food boxes to vulnerable people. Fly-tipping was not ignored in the Borough. Since the lockdown measures had eased, the Safer Place Officers had returned to their normal duties issuing fines where appropriate and following up on reported cases. The new Enforcement Manager took up his post today and he will be responsible for the enforcement team, enforcement within the Borough and the handling of investigations into cases
- The Community Safety Unit (CSU) had been restructured; the ASB Housing Officers had been relocated to the CSU and had been working closely with the Strategic Manager and the Community Safety Operations Manager on issues on Council estates. They had also been working closely with the Housing department to resolve ASB issues swiftly with effective use of the powers that the Council had available to them. During the process of dealing with ASB cases, the victims were given reassurance and engaged with.
- The ASB Housing Officers had been working on a number of cases and currently did not require any additional resources for the team; a significant amount of work had been undertaken in line with the Assistant Director (Housing) to build on improvements in the service. If the team received an influx of cases then the Community Safety Operations Manager would discuss with the Portfolio Holder what needed to be done

- The increase in figures in ASB on page 16 reflected an increase in incidents whereby residents not following Government guidance in relation to Covid-19 were being reported to the Police

Cllr Meade was pleased with the effective litter campaign posted around Town and was hopeful that it would make people think before littering again; he asked that thanks be recorded to the Safer Place Officers for their hard work during lockdown supporting the vulnerable residents of Gravesham.

The Chair agreed with the recording of thanks and assured the Committee that the new Enforcement Manager would be invited to attend a Committee meeting in the future.

Place

1. Design a quality and affordable leisure offer

The Assistant Director (Communities) gave the Committee a brief summary of the performance that related to Policy Commitment One within Objective Number Two: People.

Members of the Committee praised GCLL for the professional and safe manner in which the gyms had been reopened; it was noted that the reopening of the gyms may have helped boost mental wellbeing for users.

The Committee raised concern over the future of GCLL and if it's position would impact the Council's finances in any way.

The Chair advised that there was a constant dialogue open between GCLL and GBC and Rob Swain had held discussions with senior management at several Management Team meetings. The Council wanted to ensure that there was a quality and affordable leisure offer in the Borough and the GCLL were part of that desire; it was hoped that the Government would release some additional funding in the future to support the leisure industry.

2. Manage a programme of proactive healthy living interventions

The Assistant Director (Communities) gave the Committee a brief summary of the performance that related to Policy Commitment Two within Objective Number Two: People.

The Chair thanked the Gr@nd for their continued support over the course of the lockdown.

3. Develop a cohesive and resilient community

The Assistant Director (Communities) advised that any questions for the third policy commitment would be picked up in one of the reports.

4. Enhance the Borough's cultural offer

Cllr Elliott raised an issue with inclusivity at recent events as he felt that the public hadn't had presentation at various events. As an example, Cllr Elliott reported that the Battle of Britain commemoration event held at Cascades today was not attended by himself or Cllr Ashenden as they had not been informed of the event by officers even though it was being held in their own ward, which was unacceptable.

The Chair noted the frustrations of Councillors finding out about events through social media rather than through the Council, but he advised that the event held earlier today was arranged at short notice by the Civic Chaplain and it was meant to be a simpler event, given Covid-19 restrictions on attendance. . Such commemorations, including higher profile ones, had been cancelled nationally..

Members of the Committee echoed Cllr Elliot's point about being informed of events in their wards so that Councillors could attend and represent their constituents.

Concern was raised by a Member that a number of faith groups and organisations that had carried out great work during the lockdown supporting residents had not received recognition from their efforts. In particular the work of the Sikh and Muslim groups was very well received and their efforts helped Gravesham residents from going without food over lockdown however there was no mention of that concerted effort in the recent 'Your Borough' magazine.

The Chair advised that the Community Involvement Officer was instrumental in the Community/Pandemic Hero Awards which were handed out last week; there were some fantastic nominations for the awards from all across the Community which resulted in a large range of diversity. The awards showcased the best that Gravesham had to offer to the Community over the lockdown and a significant portion of it was dedicated to the faith groups that supported Gravesham.

The Service Manager (Customer & Theatre Services) added that there were a huge number of organisations that provided support during the pandemic and as part of the strategic review of community groups, the Council wanted to pull together a better picture of the support being delivered across the Borough . The report the Committee will receive tonight was only the beginning of the work and the Council had to ensure that all organisations were being engaged with. The Council had never dealt with a pandemic before so it was a learning experience which would be fed back into the review; the next report on the agenda will explain the matter further for Members.

Cllr Rana advised that the Sikh Community were very proud of the work they did to support the most vulnerable in Gravesham and thanked the Community Involvement Officer for the award they received last week. The whole community came together, and it should be emphasised in the next edition of the 'Your Borough' magazine all of the fantastic work that faith groups carried out in a short period of time.

5. Promote Gravesham's arts and heritage

The Assistant Director (Communities) gave the Committee a brief summary of the performance that related to Policy Commitment Five within Objective Number Two: People.

The Assistant Director (Communities) added that the report did not reflect that fact that the planned Dickens 150th anniversary celebrations had to be postponed. However the Mayor was able to attend Gads Hill, working in conjunction with the school and he laid Charles Dickens favourite flowers there on the day. An extract from a play called 'Dickens Dream', commissioned by the Council, also went live on social media on the day.

The Committee was advised by a Member for Higham Ward that Higham Parish Council were looking to hold further commemorations next year.

Following a suggestion by a Member of the Committee that art be used to record all of the community spirit and hard work seen during the lockdown, the Chair advised that some lockdown art had already been created and was going to be exhibited this Saturday. The Chair added that the Council would be discussing the pandemic for many years to come and creative art would play a big role in memorialising all of the actions during lockdown.

The Committee noted the information contained within the report.

49. Impact of Covid 19 on Gravesham's Community Sector

The Committee was provided with a summary of a recent survey conducted in partnership with North West Kent Council for Voluntary Services of local community organisations in Gravesend. It identified how they had been impacted by Covid 19 and how they had adapted their services to meet changing needs.

The Community Involvement Officer highlighted key points from the report regarding the financial impact seen to the organisations within Gravesham and the responses received from the various groups to the survey.

The Community Involvement Officer fielded questions from the Committee and explained that:

- The survey was circulated by the CVS and there circulation list may not have included Choice however if Members felt that any groups had been missed out then they would be followed up and their feedback attain as the Council wanted as much feedback as possible from the widest network
- In the future the survey could be revised to make it simpler and allow for more smaller community groups to take part which would include scout groups and sports clubs
- All of the groups involved have had regular circulation of all information pertaining to funding and many of the groups have already had successful bids to Kent Community Funding

The Service Manager (Customer & Theatre Services) further explained that the review will help to create a clear picture of what services were available, where there were any gaps, what challenges the various groups faced and where the Council could of provided further support.

The Committee noted the information contained within the report.

50. Cultural Strategy

The Cultural Manager provided Members of the Committee with a copy of the final Art & Culture Strategy.

The Cultural Manager informed Members that on 03 June Committee they were presented with a discussion paper on the development of an arts and culture strategy for the Borough and asked to agree the proposed focus, vision and priorities following a consultation and engagement process with residents and members of the creative sector. Following that meeting and taking into account all of Members comments and suggestions the final strategy has been developed ready for Member approval.

The Chair thanked the Cultural Manager for all of the hard work she put into creating the Art & Culture Strategy.

The Committee discussed and were impressed by the ambition of the Strategy; the phrase 'cultural hub of North Kent' was highlighted as the Committee felt that the Strategy would actually enable Gravesham to become the cultural hub of all of Kent.

The Committee approved the Art & Culture Strategy.

51. Draft Tourism & Heritage Strategy

The Committee were presented with the draft Tourism and Heritage Strategy for Gravesham.

The Town Twinning & Tourism Manager advised Members that they had seen the first draft and the Strategy was still a work in progress; key points were highlighted from the report regarding the future of tourism in Gravesham, the benefits of the Reef redevelopment and the changing attitudes of people having staycations due to Covid-19. The next step for the development of the Strategy will be for the Town Twinning & Tourism Manager to further engage with Gravesham's tourism and heritage partners.

The Assistant Director (Communities) and the Town Twinning & Tourism Manager fielded questions from the Committee and explained that:

- The announcement that the Eurostar would no longer stop at Ebbsfleet and Ashford stations was very disappointing as it was a key part of the Strategy in terms of expanding access to Gravesham from London. However the high speed train to St Pancras was still in place and a number of parties had been championing the area to the Government in order to reinstate Ebbsfleet as a station in the route. It was difficult to predict the impact to tourist numbers but figures could be attained on arrivals and departures at Ebbsfleet to give Members a rough idea
- With regards to impact on cruise liners, the Town Twinning & Tourism Manager had built up an excellent working relationship with the cruise liners. They had been encouraged to come to Gravesend but it was not currently known how Covid-19 would affect their future. River transport from Gravesend to London was still an aim for the Town and the Assistant Director (Communities) reported that the Council was in dialogue with partners on that matter
- Gravesham had a stronger relationship with the Port of London Authority than the City of London Corporation; the PLA had a strong vision for the future of the Thames which included Gravesend as the PLA were based in the Town
- The figures in the report around the number of visitors to Gravesend was gathered through the Councils partnership with Visit Kent and through the Cambridge Model which looked at local statistics (accommodation, transport, number of attractions and total visits to attractions) and then calculated the results from that evidence using an algorithm

With regard to the Eurostar route, the Chair added that there was cross party Member support for the route and representation had been made at KCC and Parliament for the route to extend to Ebbsfleet and Ashford.

Several suggestions were put forward by the Committee for inclusion in the Strategy:

- Windmill Hill was a great asset to the Borough that went largely unnoticed; the hill provided extraordinary views over Gravesend and the Thames. A viewing platform or similar structure could be built atop the hill alongside a café/coffee kiosk in order to attract tourists to that area and provide something different than other Towns had on offer
- Additional permanent attractions along Gravesend waterfront to rival what was offered at the Strand in Medway
- Greater emphasis should be placed upon the heritage surrounding Pocahontas' history in Gravesend and her statue in St Georges Church
- Gravesend should be made more attractive to incoming ships and modes of river transport travelling along the Thames; the image of Gravesend had to be enhanced to maintain interest from the river
- When gathering figures for visitation to Gravesend, residents should be spoken too as well so that the results were not only gathered from computer algorithms; it was felt that feedback from residents would make the results more balanced
- It was suggested that the website required further development, possibly funded by section 106 monies, to advertise more of the heritage within Gravesend and offer virtual tours of visitor points and historical parts of the Town. By including more content on the website it would attract more internet traffic to the website and then encourage more visitors to then make a trip to Gravesend to see the advertised attractions/heritage areas etc
- An outlet centre built within Gravesham would drive up tourism numbers

The Assistant Director (Communities) advised that promotion of the Town was important and Visit Gravesend and Discover Gravesham websites both held relevant information about Gravesend and its heritage. The Section 106 monies may be difficult to use for development of the Council website as there was a lot of competing demand on that funding and getting any of that money diverted towards tourism was difficult. Members were assured that the team would look at other activities that revolved around culture and arts within Gravesend as it would be a key driver for people to visit Gravesend in the future both locally and from afar.

The Assistant Director (Communities) thanked Members for their feedback which would be taken under advisement for inclusion in the Strategy.

52. Modern Slavery Strategy

The Committee were provided with a draft Strategy that aimed to increase their understanding of modern slavery in the local area and offered an approach that would enable the Council to fulfil its statutory obligations as a First Responder organisation. The Strategy supported the Council's wider Safeguarding agenda and would ensure that the Council had procedures in place that were robust and would withstand scrutiny.

The Strategic Manager gave Members an overview of the report highlighting key points regarding the Strategy, the Council's responsibility when an officer encountered a potential victim of modern slavery, the training given to staff and the public to raise awareness and the proposed launch of the Strategy to coincide with National Anti-Slavery Day on 18 October 2020.

The Strategic Manager was thanked for providing a robust Strategy and the Committee agreed that regular training was needed for Members on Modern Slavery and the new responsibilities placed on the Council as a first responder by the Modern Slavery Act 2015

The Strategic Manager explained that training for staff and Members would be included in a draft action plan that was being developed to support the delivery of the Strategy and the training for staff would be mandatory; the intention was that when new staff were recruited the training would become part of their induction to the Council. The induction training could be a short online training session and it would also be appropriate for new Members as part of the Member Induction Training Programme. By incorporating into the Council's normal route and programmes it would eventually increase people's confidence in their understanding of the issue and normalise reporting any suspected cases as there was still some hesitancy amongst the public.

The Chair advised that Committee Services fell under the Leaders portfolio but he felt that the Leader would not have any issue with Committee Services incorporating Modern Slavery into the Members training programme.

The Committee agreed to the Strategy, subject to any amendments, ready for formal approval by the Chair as the Portfolio Holder.

53. Anti-Social Behaviour Update

The Community Safety Operations Manager presented the Committee with an update on the progress with the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Strategy: he highlighted key points from the following section within the report:

- Prevention and Community Involvement
- Prevention and Intervention
- Support Intervention
- Enforcement
- Communication and Reassurance

The Chair further explained that the report included figures from Kent Police and it was crucial that accurate data was recorded for each case in order to understand the level of anti-social behaviour and how it could be prevented in the future. Cooperation between Council departments was also very important, as outlined in the Communication and Reassurance part of the report, as working together allowed for a coordinated approach to the issues that Gravesham residents faced from anti-social behaviour.

Cllr Meade echoed the Chair's comment for a coordinated approach being required and further requested that the partnership should also include Councillors so that intelligence could be shared with Councillors about ASB issues in their respective wards.

The Chair advised that data distribution amongst local Councillors was a matter he previously raised with the Kent Police Crime Commissioner as there was a reporting issue on Kent Police statistics which did not allow for separate ward data to be collected. Kent Police were aware of the issue and they had taken the issue up with the PCC as they needed additional resources.

Cllr Meade advised that he previously lobbied the Police Crime Commissioner on similar points and would continue to do so.

The Community Safety Operations Manager advised that a key aspect would be working in local areas and working closely with the Comms team to push messages out to all the wards in the Borough. The team will also work with Kent Police as their communications team also put messages out via social media. An example of the team working closely with the Police was the section 59 notices issued to people riding bikes dangerously in Woodlands Park as information was shared between the Council and the Police in order to control the issue.

The Chair paid tribute to Chief Inspector Neil Loudon and Inspector Craig West as they were very responsive to the Council's questions and were full of useful information for the team. With regard to the issuing of section 59 notices to the bike users, the Chair appreciated the team work between the two organisations and encouraged further sharing of information as it would make the Strategy stronger.

In response to a question regarding the team's previous pop up booths and the reinstatement of Community Champion awards, the Community Safety Operations Manager advised that:

- The Community Safety pop-up shop will be determined by how the Government dealt with Covid-19 over the coming months; it was something the team wanted to do and the pop up shop was a success last year. It will be something that will be progressed in the future if possible
- The Community Champion Awards were put on by the Crime Prevention Panel; they used to be located at Bluewater but they aren't there anymore and due to Covid-29 they haven't operated for a while. The Community Safety Operations Manager agreed to make contact with them about the awards but if they were unable to then the Council could look at doing something similar

The Committee noted the information contained within the report.

54. Violence Against Women & Girls

Following the conclusion of the Home Office funded project, Altogether Safer – Reducing VAWG in North Kent) in March 2020, the Committee were presented with a report that gave Members a brief overview of the impact of the different strands of the project during its lifetime. It was noted that the report only provided key highlights but a full Independent Evaluation Report of the Project would be shared with Members on request to the Community Safety Unit.

The Strategic Manager gave Members a detailed overview of the report and highlighted key points from the following sections within the report:

- The Police Station Based IDVA Service
- Engagement with domestic abuse support services across BAME communities
- Choose Respect Programme
- Overall Assessment, Value for Money and Future Work
- Next Steps

The Strategic Manager advised that page 102 held the overall assessment of the project, but she would share the independent valuation, which was submitted to the Home Office, with Members.

The Chair advised that the total of £248,464.00 awarded over 3 years to the Altogether Safer Project sounded like a large sum of money but when it was broken down it wasn't a lot however preventative work was important and was a more cost effective option.

The Committee gave their thanks to the Strategic Manager for her hard work and stretching the limited funding available to her during the length of the project.

Several suggestions were put forward by the Committee:

- Some victims of domestic abuse may not be able to contact services, interact with shops or search for help via social media due to their domestic situation so more discreet paths should be investigated. One such path could be to work with local Pizza delivery stores which could place a sticker inside each pizza box listing a number for domestic abuse to call if they were in need. Another example would be attaching the number to letters that the Council sent out regularly such as reminders to pay rent etc
- Domestic abuse also affected men and one of the biggest killers of young men was suicide; a recent study revealed that men aged 16-24 were in risk of being subjected to controlling behaviour in the household. Cllr Meade intended to lobby the Home Office on projects to help young men in need

With regards to discreet methods of getting in contact with domestic abuse victims, the Chair advised that the contact number was attached to the side of the refuse lorries and help was always available at the Gr@nd but he agreed more could always be done.

The Strategic Manager welcomed the suggestions from the Committee and explained that the team were always looking for further ways to reach the wider community and provide support. Representatives of the Community Safety Unit attended the North Kent Domestic Abuse Forum and the CSU could look at different ways of publishing the support information from that forum to spread it more broadly. The Altogether Project was mainly focused on women and young girls but men and young boys were also often victims of domestic abuse and work would still be undertaken with partner agencies to help them.

In response to a question the Strategic Manager advised that the Altogether Safer project was meant for the whole community, not just the BAME residents, the advisor services and Choose Respect programme were available to everybody. The least costly part of the project was to support the BAME community and when the Council bid for the funding the criteria that was provided to the team by the Home Office required the team to look at preventative work, particularly with hard to reach and under-represented groups in those accessing services. Once the criteria was met by the services that were on offer the bid was successful and the team were keen to reach out to the immigrant communities that had previously little to no contact but the project as whole was for the benefit of everybody.

Members of the Committee made several suggestions about groups that needed further help and should be listed in the report:

- Young men and boys required further support as cases of domestic abuse often went unreported and they did not know how to seek help

- The elderly Asian population were at risk as culturally, most Asian parents moved in with their children when they become too old to remain living by themselves. As a result, many of the elderly population were subjected to problems due to the living situation with their extended family and they would not talk about any problems due to their culture or being too embarrassed
- During the lockdown, the Sikh community in Gravesham fed lots of the vulnerable residents from the Langa and around seventy percent of the residents that required the most support were from the white community. Many disturbing issues came to light over the course of the lockdown which the Sikh Community reported to the Council so that they could provide further assistance

The Strategic Manager was grateful for the suggestions and agreed they were points that would be taken back to the Domestic Abuse Forum and also taken into consideration when the Council reviewed its own Community Safety Strategy.. The Strategic Manager added that the elderly white population were another at risk group as there was an increase in elderly people who had been experiencing abuse for a significant number of years but never reported it as their generation were unaware of support available or very hesitant to speak up.

The Chair agreed that the community came together during lockdown and there were some hidden problems that came to light as result of the support that was given but they had all been referred to the correct departments in the Council. The Council managed to connect with a vast population of Gravesham during the pandemic which ended up helping people with problems not just related to Covid-19.

The Committee noted the information contained within the report.

55. Step Change Project

The Committee were provided with details of the Step Change Project that was initiated as the result of a successful bid to the MHCLG Domestic Abuse Service Fund submitted by the Council's Community Safety Unit. Funding was provided for the financial years 2018-19 and 2019-20 and the Project had been delivered at an operational level by Choices (domestic abuse service provider).

The Strategic Manager informed the Committee that the late announcement of invitation to bid for funding and consequently, the late release of funds to successful projects by Government meant that in reality the Project that was planned for delivery over a 2 year period had only just over 12 months within which to meet its targets. Evidence of the high demand for the service provided was served purely by the fact that the target numbers originally set were exceeded within the shortened timescales. The original target was to aim to work with approximately 80 adults and approximately 120 children. The Project actually worked successfully with 92 individuals and 180 children.

The Project was successfully delivered and clearly had some positive outcomes for the victims supported and their children. Careful monitoring and record keeping throughout the Project placed Choices in a good position in trying to find additional funding after March 2020 when MHCLG funding came to an end. Choices were able to continue delivering Step Change following a successful application for Big Lottery Funding for a wider project that also included the delivery of a further separate domestic abuse support service, the Phoenix Programme. Services were now available to victims from Medway and Maidstone as well as Dartford and Gravesham and the funding was secured until the end of March 2022.

The Chair thanked the Strategic Manager for her informative report.

The Committee noted the information contained within the report.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 21:59pm.