

Community and Leisure Cabinet Committee

Wednesday, 03 June 2020

7:30pm

Present:

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

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

Melanie Norris	Director (Communities)
Simon Hookway	Assistant Director (Communities)
Anita Tysoe	Service Manager (Customer & Theatre Services)
Mandy Hare	General Manager – Woodvilles
Ben Clarke	Committee & Scrutiny Assistant (Minutes)

39. Apologies

No apologies for absence were received.

40. Minutes

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

41. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox declared an interest in item 5 as he was the representative to the Gr@nd and on the Management Board of the GCLL.

Cllr Peter Scollard also declared an interest in item 5 as was on the Managing Board of the GCLL.

42. Coronavirus: Cabinet Portfolio Impact

The Committee was provided with an overview of the impact of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic upon the practical delivery of the respective services within the Community & Leisure Cabinet portfolio.

The Assistant Director (Communities) informed Members of the strain the pandemic put on the services within the Communities directorate and the challenges that were faced to continue to support the Community and the welfare of the staff who worked tirelessly over

the last two months. Many staff worked from home or came into the office daily while others who could not work from home or the office were happily redeployed in other areas of the Council providing support where it was needed.

Due to the constantly changing information, the Service Manager (Customer & Theatre Services) elaborated further on section two of the report regarding 'protecting shielded and other vulnerable residents':

- As of Mid-March 2.5 million people were identified as being clinically vulnerable nationally
- A letter from NHS was sent out to the identified people encouraging them to seek support by registering on the Government website; support included distributing food parcels to those in need
- On a daily basis, the Council team received 150 cases a day, seven days a week for Shielded people
- A team of 15-20 officers were trained and assembled through volunteering to focus on contacting all of the Shielded people on the list
- The Finance team tidied the data that was received, removing duplicate contact information as well as maintaining spreadsheets late in the evening and at weekends
- Each of the cases was assigned a rating of Green (no help was needed) or red (very vulnerable and needed extra support)
- The expected Gravesham caseload was around 2500 cases but as of last week the team had reached out to over 4000 people
- Another letter setting out the Council's key contact information was sent to the Shielded group
- If a person on the Shielded group did not answer any of the team's phone calls then the Safer Place Officers/CEOS carried out door knocks. If no contact persisted then the case was referred over to the Police to make a final visit
- To date, the team have made over 10,000 phone calls to every single person that was referred to the Council; those phone calls included scheduled follow up calls which are still ongoing. As part of those calls, emergency food parcels were distributed and befriending calls were made to the most lonely and vulnerable
- In addition to data from the NHS cohort, contact was received from the wider Community as a letter was sent to every household informing them how they could receive help from the Council
- An advice line and COVID-19 email was set up which was monitored 24/7 including evenings and weekends; they are both still place although the amount of contact received has been significantly reduced as many are now self-sufficient. Some of the weekly welfare visits are also ongoing to various vulnerable residents
- Over 3700 direct contacts were made to the Council and 1800 interventions were put in place including picking up medication from pharmacies and GP's
- In total there were 800 volunteer requests, 400 door knocks, 140 food parcels distributed and 100 befriending cases
- Some officers have now been able to reduce their time spent on call-backs from the NHS cohort and customer services have been able to deal with the bulk of the inquires
- The response phase has moved into the transition phase
- There were still a lot of unknowns and if a second wave or local peak occurred then the team would have to return to operating when the lockdown first started

Members approved of the letter that was sent out to the businesses and Shielded residents but raised concern over the lack of languages used; it was suggested that in the future any letters sent out to residents included more translations such as Urdu, Bengali and Punjabi.

The Director (Communities) responded that the Council largely followed Government guidance on the issue of translations and that guidance stated that Councils should not include too many translations as it would be very costly and use excessive amounts of paper. The Director (Communities) appreciated the concern but informed Members that Gravesend were in the top 5% of Councils that had contacted the most businesses about the support grant and the officers attempted communication with all residents through phone calls and door knocks if they didn't receive a response from the letter.

Officers fielded questions and comments from the Committee and explained that:

- The Director (Communities) spoke with Rob Swain (Managing Director of GCLL) about his recovery plan last week and the re-opening of the gyms will be guided by the Government guidance of maintaining social distance. There are no plans for perspex screen between equipment; instead the gym equipment will be moved onto the squash courts and sports halls to ensure social distancing between users. The changing rooms will remain closed when the gyms reopen but the toilet facilities will be re-opened
- With regards to increased reports of anti-social behaviour during lockdown, the main reasons for the increase have been the amount of calls to Police on neighbours breaking lockdown rules, issues from noise and bonfires. Previously, most ASB cases have been seen around the Town Centre, however with the lockdown in effect, cases have spiked in other areas of Gravesend
- The Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy that was adopted earlier in the year has come into the effect and there is a collaborative approach in tackling ASB between the Council and the Police

The Committee paid tribute and gave thanks to all the Council Officers and Community organisations that worked hard during the pandemic to provide support and services to all residents of the Borough.

43. Post-COVID 19 Recovery for Gravesend Town Centre

The Committee was presented with a discussion document to assist with Post Covid-19 recovery Planning for Gravesend Town Centre.

The Director (Communities) advised that creation of the report started three weeks into the lockdown but it constantly changed as the Government released new guidance every day. The report strove to develop a plan for re-opening of the Town Centre and set out a full recovery plan.

The Director (Communities) advised that the year started with approved extra budgets for various events planned throughout the year however as the pandemic worsened, the Council was forced to cancel all events for public safety. As a result, the Town Centre also saw a dramatic decrease in footfall as most stores closed and the public only ventured into Gravesend for food shopping or emergency supplies.

The Director (Communities) informed the Committee that a team of officers within the Communities directorate formed a work group and created a Plan for Town Centre recovery

which involved four main approaches, listed in full from pages 37-45 in the report. It was important that the approaches made were similar to other neighbouring local authorities so that there was unity across Kent:

- Actions undertaken during the lock down
- Planning for partial re-opening of the Town Centre
- Celebration/Commemoration events going forward
- Being part of the strategic plans for Kent

As mentioned at 6.3 of the report, social distancing measures for queuing outside of shops will commence from 15 June 2020 once the non-essential shops are allowed to reopen. The Director (Communities) explained to Members the team had been in discussions with the businesses in Gravesham to ensure social distancing was in place outside and inside the shops. In addition Parish Councils have been written to about social distancing in their village shops. There will be marshals in the Town Centre to ensure social distancing takes place and Parishes have been offered the services of volunteer marshals.

It was suggested by a Member of the Committee that the free period of two hours parking on a Saturday be extended to accommodate people who have had to wait in long lines, due to social distancing measures, to complete all of their shopping.

The Chair advised that car parking fell under the Leader's portfolio and the point would be raised with him outside of the meeting.

Officers fielded questions and comments from the Committee and explained that:

- The Council was waiting for authorisation to purchase digital notice boards using Government grant money to promote local activities
- Due to the plans for socially distanced lines once New Road reopens its shops on June 15th the benches will not be replaced however they will be left at key places at the end of New Road in each direction. The marshals will assist any elderly or disabled people to one of the benches location if they were in need; they would also be on hand to talk to staff in shops to let them in as a priority shopper
- There is a comprehensive plan in place to install signage reminding shoppers to socially distance in the Town Centre; the Assistant Director (Communities) walked around the Town Centre with the suppliers identifying key places where the signs needed to be erected. They will be installed prior to 15 June 2020
- The Environmental Health and Licensing Teams will be leading on giving advice to shop owners regarding social distancing within their premises and enforcing compliance; the team's main focus will be on the small to medium sized businesses that may require further assistance to receive their certificate of compliance. Members were encouraged to submit anything they felt prudent, regarding assistance for the Town Centres shops, by email to the Assistant Director (Communities)
- The Communities teams have been researching ways of commemorating the key workers and people who have died from COVID-19; it is likely that a plaque will be created and put up in the local hospital or somewhere similar. It has been deemed inappropriate to install anything at the moment but it will happen in the near future
- As Captain Tom Moore was married in Gravesham, a letter of congratulations can be sent to him in recognition of his service and Knighthood

The Chair was happy for a letter to be sent out to Captain Tom Moore but he advised that it would be more suitable for the letter to be sent by the Mayor than the Committee.

44. Arts & Culture Strategy for Gravesham

The Committee was presented with a discussion paper on the development of an arts and culture strategy for the Borough.

The Service Manager (Customer & Theatre Services) introduced the report, explaining that the document was a work in progress that set out the intended vision of the Town and the intention to make Gravesham a serious contender for external funding from organisations such as the Arts Council and attracting aspiring artists from London etc. Before any funding can be applied for, a clear Arts & Culture Strategy will need to be in place.

The General Manager – Woodvilles informed the Committee of the work that had gone into the Strategy so far:

- Lots of planning has been carried out around organising festivals, parades and community events in Gravesham. Lengthy conversations have been had with local artists about how to promote art in Gravesham, attract investment and further develop their interests
- At this moment in time, the Strategy is in the consultation phase; surveys have been posted to residents and a similar survey was also given to stakeholders to seek their views on the Strategy. The responses received from residents was overall very positive and there was a lot of enthusiasm from the public for a Strategy to be in place
- A questionnaire has also been sent out to the managers of cultural assets within Gravesham to scope out the current and projected footfall and income generated by the assets
- The steering group for the Strategy was also given a series of questions to consider
- The vision for the Strategy over the next ten years has stemmed from comments received from the local artistic community and hopefully Gravesham will become the cultural hub of North Kent leading on big events and community programmes

The General Manager – Woodvilles further explained key points from the report regarding the vision for Gravesham and the priorities of the Strategy:

- Growing a cultural and creative community
- Supporting and developing artists and creatives
- Vibrant and aspirational arts and cultural events programme
- Enhancing and promoting our assets and heritage
- Developing our children and young people creative

A few suggestions were made by the Committee:

- That the snake made of pebbles created by children living on Whinfall Way in Riverview be set in concrete or something similar to stand as a memory of something positive created during the COVID-19 pandemic
- All Members should be able to express their views on the Strategy by emailing the General Manager – Woodvilles with their comments

- Social media should be utilised to get the message out to a wider audience and seek their views via online comments and forms etc
- A permanent Arts Centre/gallery space for local artists to use and exhibit their work should be built

In response to the suggestions, the Chair:

- agreed that setting the snake in concrete was a good idea and promised to discuss it outside of the meeting
- The General Manager – Woodvilles had already put the message out over social media regarding the Strategy asking for the public's views

The Director (Communities) informed Members that there was already an Arts Centre in development within the St George's Centre which will be used to showcase different genres of Art. The feedback from local artists has been very positive in the main and as larger events cannot be held in the future, it will be a prime place to hold smaller scale events for the public.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 20:49pm.