

Classification: Public
Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Community & Leisure Cabinet Committee
Date: 15 March 2021
Reporting officer: Assistant Director (Communities)
Subject: Portfolio COVID Update Report

Purpose and summary of report:

To provide Members of the Community & Leisure Cabinet Committee with an update against how the Council has responded to the COVID Pandemic, both in terms of specific activities in response to the Pandemic and how the Council has managed to maintain service delivery across Council services.

Recommendations:

None – the report is for information purposes only.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The practical impact of the global Covid-19 health Pandemic for the Council emerged in late 2019-20, principally via the Prime Minister’s speech to the nation on 23 March 2020 and the enactment of the Coronavirus Act 2020. This resulted in the Council undertaking a number of different work streams in order to support the community and the Council’s employees during the Pandemic.
- 1.2 In June 2020, a report was presented to the Committee to set out the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic upon the practical delivery of the respective services within the portfolio.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Members on the approach to the Pandemic, both throughout the first lockdown and in response to any additional work streams that have been implemented as a result of the subsequent lockdowns announced by central government in November 2020 and January 2021. In addition, it provides an overview of how the Council has continued to deliver its services, despite the additional pressure brought about by the Pandemic.

2. Response to the COVID Work Streams

- 2.1 Throughout the Pandemic, the Council has taken responsibility for providing support to thousands of residents and local businesses across the borough, both in response to government initiatives but also in its role as a Community Leader.

Specifically, in relation to the Community & Leisure Portfolio, the following actions have been taken:

Supporting Vulnerable People (NHS Shielded and Extremely vulnerable residents)

- 2.2 By the end of the first lockdown period (July 2020), 5,214 residents in total (shielded and extremely vulnerable) were directly supported by the Council, 11,491 phone calls were made over the duration of the project and 592 door knocks were undertaken for those residents where contact was not possible.
- 2.3 The Council has continued to support those residents deemed Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) in the subsequent lockdowns. Whilst the Council did not stand back up the full process that was undertaken in the first phase of lockdown, all new referrals have had either a telephone call, text message or e-mail (wherever possible) to advise them of the support that the Council has in place.

Interactions with external agencies

- 2.4 Since the start of the Pandemic, the Council has worked with a number of partners and agencies to ensure the provision of services to residents in the borough namely the Foodbanks at The Hive and Riverside and Alzheimer's & Dementia.
- 2.5 The Council distributed financial support through the Emergency Support Grant for organisations experiencing additional demand for services.

Test and Trace Support

- 2.6 From November 2020, the Council has been supporting the national Test and Trace process by contacting those who have tested positive for COVID but have been uncontactable by the national service and Kent County Council. Up to the end of January 2021, the Council has received 79 referrals from KCC.

3. Maintaining Council Services

- 3.1 Despite the substantial challenge presented by the Pandemic, with the authority having to divert significant resources and, equally, adapt to new statutory requirements introduced by the government's legislative programme, the Council has continued to deliver quality frontline community services.
- 3.2 For the Community and Leisure portfolio, this includes but is not exclusive to:
 - 3.2.1 Community events, delivered as part of the Council's community engagement work, taking place within Covid-19 restrictions or online, with major events activity being cancelled or deferred.
 - 3.2.2 Programming for The Woodville and other arts and cultural development throughout the year, some of which were able to take place, others deferred or cancelled due to the Pandemic. Plans for hosting the annual Pantomime had to be adjusted with the broadcasting of an online version. Programme of Christmas events modified or deferred, including Lights Festival.
 - 3.2.3 Support to Gravesham's local artists and creatives via virtual meetings of the Gravesham Arts Salon, distribution of Make It grants, Virtual Blake series of community exhibitions, and advice around funding assistance, e.g. from Arts Council England.

- 3.2.4 Implementation of the strategy for Gravesend Borough Market against a year with lengthy periods of closure of non-essential retail, continued functioning of food operators and the running of themed markets as and when possible.
- 3.2.5 Managing the impact on sports development activity, cessation of outdoor sports pitch usage and Summer Fun activities; ongoing pitch maintenance; and support to local clubs and sports organisations to access funding.
- 3.2.6 Ongoing support to Gravesham Community Leisure Limited (GCLL) during lockdown, financial pressures and the dramatic impacts on usage – reduction in attendance of 80% over the year to end December 2020.
- 3.2.7 Delivery of public health and youth services on a variety of alternative platforms, given the physical closure of The Gr@nd; online meetings of Gravesham Youth Council.
- 3.2.8 Community Safety response to changes to reported crime figures as a consequence of the Pandemic; implementation of the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy; upgrading of Town Centre CCTV cameras to HD Digital.
- 3.2.9 Commitment to provision of online of visitor information services during the disruption to service within the Borough Market; deferment of plans to commemorate Dickens 150.
- 3.3 Throughout the Pandemic the Council has also implemented new projects and initiatives to deliver on the pledges made within the authority's adopted Corporate Plan (2019-23).
- 3.4 For the Community and Leisure portfolio, this includes but is not exclusive to:
 - 3.4.1 Setting up of the Gravesham Community Safety Partnership, supported by multi-agency groups – Vulnerability Panel, Serious Organised Crime, Youth Engagement, Area Based Action, ASB and Modern Slavery.
 - 3.4.2 Adoption and implementation of a Modern Slavery Strategy.
 - 3.4.3 Resourcing of the Council's Environmental Enforcement team, incorporating a new Environmental Enforcement Manager and focusing of Street Scene Enforcement Officers (formerly Safer Place Officers) on actions to enforce against incidents of fly tipping incidents.
 - 3.4.4 Consultation and adoption of a strategy for Arts & Culture; plans for a new arts and cultural centre in St George's.
 - 3.4.5 Adoption of a Community Engagement Strategy.
 - 3.4.6 Adoption of a Tourism & Heritage; experiential tourism development support for businesses through the EXPERIENCE partnership project.

4. Next Steps and Future Work Streams

- 4.1 The COVID-19 Pandemic is still affecting the borough of Gravesham, and the entire country, and as such it is necessary for the Council to continue to be responsive to the needs of its community, as well as supporting officers and Members alike.

- 4.2 Specific work streams include:
- 4.2.1 Future provision of council owned leisure centres – proposals to be informed by feasibility study which is underway.
 - 4.2.2 Working with GCLL to sustain leisure centre activity and services.
 - 4.2.3 Consultation activity in support of a Sport, Lesiure & Active Recreation Strategy.
 - 4.2.4 Development of district focused community safety activity under the new Community Safety Partnership; confirmation of new Community Safety Strategy.
 - 4.2.5 Fit-out works for the opening of the new arts and cultural centre in St George's.
 - 4.2.6 Supporting plans for major arts and cultural events deferred to 2021 – England's Creative Coast and Estuary 2021 and Creative Estuary activities.
 - 4.2.7 Programming of major and community events activity in the light of the Government's Roadmap out of Lockdown.
 - 4.2.8 Ongoing Covid-19 response activity.

5. Background papers

- 5.1 Background papers pertaining to this report are held by the Corporate Change Manager. Anyone wishing to inspect background papers should, in the first place, be directed to Committee & Electoral Services who will make the necessary arrangements.

IMPLICATIONS	APPENDIX 1
Legal	In response to the Pandemic, the Government put in place the Coronavirus Act 2020 as well as updating the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 and other key health-related regulations.
Finance and Value for Money	<p>Specifically in relation to the Council's own budgets, updates have been provided in the quarterly budget reports that have been presented to and reviewed by Cabinet over the course of the year.</p> <p>In relation to funding specifically for COVID, the Council has received funding from central Government in two key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific grants have been provided to enable the Council to administer the schemes put in place by the Government, such as the various Business Grants schemes that have been put in place. • The Council has also received c.£1.8m of non-ring fenced funding from the Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government (MHCLG) to help meet the unprecedented pressures resulting from the Pandemic.
Risk Assessment	<p>The COVID-19 Pandemic presented, and continues to present, significant risks for the Council, particularly in terms of delivery of critical services to the public. As has been demonstrated through this report, the Council's overall response to the Pandemic has enabled those services to continue to operate effectively.</p> <p>The Pandemic also presented risks to the Gravesham community, both residents and businesses. The Council has been able to support both groups in minimising these risks by ensuring prompt payments of grants and allowances to support them through this tough time.</p>
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<p><i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i></p> <p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of personal data or special category data or criminal offence data? N/A</p> <p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice? N/A</p> <p>c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at gdpr@medway.gov.uk. N/A</p>
Equality Impact Assessment	<p>a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer. No</p>

IMPLICATIONS	APPENDIX 1
	<p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer.</p> <p>N/A</p> <p><i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i></p>
Corporate Plan	The way in which the Council has responded to the Pandemic has ensured that services have continued to operate effectively, which is fundamental to the delivery of all objectives within the Corporate Plan.
Climate Change	No direct implications.
Crime and Disorder	As outlined in the report in respect of community safety activity – Community Safety Partnership, environmental enforcement, etc.
Digital and website implications	No implications.
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	Enhanced safeguarding through restructuring of Community Safety Partnership.