

Community & Leisure Cabinet Committee

Thursday, 9 November 2023

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Lauren Sullivan (Chair)
Cllr Tony Rana (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Helen Ashenden
Derek Ashenden
Ejaz Aslam
Deborah Croxton
Karina O'Malley
Christina Rolles

Tom Reynolds	Assistant Director for Inclusive Growth
Anita Tysoe	Head of Community Support
Keith Grimley	Senior Economic Development Officer
Danielle Lock	Leisure Manager
Adrian Hickmott	Leisure and Resilience Manager
Kirsty Gaunt	Community Involvement Officer
Chloe Taylor	Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

46. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Alan Metcalf (Cllr Derek Ashenden substituted) and Cllr Benjamin Sizer.

47. Minutes

The minutes of Community and Leisure Cabinet Committee held on Tuesday 12 September 2023 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

48. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

49. Economic Development, Industrial, Jobs & Skills Strategy - Presentation

The Senior Economic Development Officer provided Members of the committee with a presentation that covered the economic development, industrial, jobs and skills strategy, and highlighted the following key points:

- The Council's developing a 10 – year strategic plan to support jobs and business growth. The strategy will sit alongside existing strategies such as the emerging Local Plan and the Corporate Plan. This strategy is about reviewing the practical steps the Council's business-facing services can take, how the Council can respond to the

changes in local economy, and supporting both the needs of the employees and the employers.

- The last Gravesham business network event was held at new well-being business, House of Leyla, on 5 October. 60 people attended this event, and it was an opportunity, as part of the Big Conversation, to listen to local businesses views on the emerging vision and objectives for the strategy. Feedback was provided that will help shape the strategy. Further consultation is planned.
- The Gravesham Business network has a membership of 565 businesses. These events showcase local business and what the Borough has to offer - they were held on a quarterly basis.
- The emerging strategy aims to strike a balance; supporting the existing economy and opportunities for inclusive growth.
- In the past, there has been a big focus on the town centre, but it was important to also consider the urban and village centres to capture all settings/opportunities.
- There was a lot to be said around the communication with businesses, establishing how they can engage with us and what partnerships can be offered.
- 90% of the businesses within the borough employ less than 10 employees. 1.1% employ more than 50. This was important to acknowledge because the support and growth for businesses would be different.
- It was important that as part of the strategy the Council addressed barriers such as access to space, infrastructure, business support/advice and businesses reaching net zero requirements.
- An economy's made up of a skilled workforce or a talent pool, so it's important to ensure that there's a workforce in place to cater to the needs of the local businesses. It was also noted that there are significant socio-economic and health inequalities in the borough, including skills deprivation. The Council have been working with local colleges to encourage training that caters to the skills in demand locally. It was also important to acknowledge that business would look to invest where there was a skilled workforce.
- Further consultation is planned throughout the development of the strategy and a broad timeline was presented to show key tasks/milestones on route to completing the strategy.

Following questions and comments from members, the Senior Economic Development Officer explained the following:

- The Assistant Director for Inclusive Growth agreed to look into and consider the concerns raised around delivery accessibility points within the town centre, particularly where it prohibits/restricts businesses from loading/unloading deliveries.
- Recent studies had shown that there was a growing arts sector within Gravesham and the Council were looking to support the inclusive growth of this sector.
- The Assistant Director for Inclusive Growth advised that this may involve looking more creatively at vacant units within the council's control, particularly within the town centre, and uses other than retail. For example, an Art pop-up has recently opened in St Georges and opportunities for other uses, like office spaces and digital work spaces, are being scoped.
- The Senior Economic Development Officer made reference to the use of digital shopfronts which mimic a shop via the use of a digitalised screen. It allowed micro-businesses to have a 'shop-front' without the need for renting a premise full time and continuing the operate out of their home or their premise of choice.

- It was important to showcase why businesses should invest in Gravesham, through clearer branding and place shaping and to consider the town centre as a sustainable and rich mix of uses/opportunities as opposed to just a retail offer.

The Committee noted the report.

50. Events

The Leisure Manager presented Members of the committee with a report that detailed an overview of the council's events programme during 2023, and the planning for future events in 2023/24. It was recommended that the committee noted the outcome of the events organised by the council and in partnership with others and makes known its priorities for consideration in future event programming. The following key points were highlighted:

- It was important that the events held were as family friendly as possible, and it was evident within the attendance statistics and footage that this was achieved.
- New events had been held in 2023, particularly around Halloween following the cancellation of the firework event.
- The summer fun programme had showcased the borough by holding scavenger hunts in local parks.
- The Christmas light switch on was arranged for Saturday 18 November 2023 and the Council were hopeful this would increase footfall for the businesses within the town centre.

The Committee noted the report.

51. Community Engagement Activity & Strategy

The Community Involvement Officer provided Members of the committee with a report that updated them on the progress of community engagement activity including the Community Engagement Strategy.

Following questions and comments from Members, the Community Involvement Officer explained that:

- This was an annual update.
- The feedback being delivered to residents who have attended the Big Conversation events were something to be worked on. However, housing representatives and tenant representatives were able to feedback to residents. There were also details of general information that could be listed on the GBC website, such as nuisance bikes and parking enforcement etc.
- If members wanted to discuss a Big Conversation event within their ward, they were advised to contact the Head of Community Support.
- The Assistant Director for Inclusive Growth advised that good volumes of feedback from the design code Big Conversations was received, using the multiplatform approach (in person events, outreach and digital questionnaires).

The Committee noted the report.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.41pm