

Community & Leisure Cabinet Committee

Monday, 11 March 2024

7.30 pm

Present:

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

Councillors: Derek Ashenden
 Helen Ashenden
 Deborah Croxton
 Lee Croxton
 Alan Metcalf
 Karina O'Malley
 Benjamin Sizer

Tom Reynolds	Assistant Director (Inclusive Growth)
Anita Tysoe	Head of Service (Community Support)
Keith Grimley	Senior Economic Development Officer
Virginie Whittaker	Tourism & Heritage Manager
Mandy Hare	Cultural Manager
Miranda Chapman	Managing Director - Pillory Barn
Karen Gingles	Committee Services Officer

52. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Ejaz Aslam and Cllr Christina Rolles. Councillors Derek Ashenden and Lee Croxton attended as their substitutes.

53. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 9 November 2023 were signed by the chair.

54. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

55. Tourism and Heritage update

The Assistant Director (Inclusive Growth) introduced Miranda Chapman from Pillory Barn to the Committee. He explained that under the Tourism and Heritage Strategy the key ambitions were to attract visitors, grow the visitor economy and protect Gravesham's rich heritage. He noted that this piece of work is a further step in responding to these ambitions and to Gravesham's potential as a growing visitor destination. He explained that the study is

funded from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund and brand and marketing specialists, Pillory Barn, were undertaking the place branding study, which would celebrate the incredible borough of Gravesend; its unique towns and villages and be developed with stakeholders - providing a tool kit for Officers to improve promotional materials on a range of platforms.

Miranda Chapman gave a presentation to the Committee which can be viewed on the following link:

[\(Public Pack\) Tourism & Heritage Update Presentation Agenda Supplement for Community & Leisure Cabinet Committee, 11/03/2024 19:30 \(gravesend.gov.uk\)](#)

The presentation outlined key aspects of the development, benefits and next steps of the place branding project:

- Pillory Barn were a Kent based business who had previously developed bespoke place branding for other authorities in Kent, including Ashford, Sevenoaks and Folkestone & Hythe.
- The process involved closely working alongside departments of the Council to develop a place brand tool kit unique to Gravesend.
- A lot of research had been carried out already in the borough, with the team collating data and investigating themes over the last two months.
- It was noted that Gravesend's visitor economy was growing fast, more so than in other boroughs. Therefore, it was a great time to develop the brand.
- As an initial place project, promotional window vinyls had been displayed in the windows of Debenhams in the town centre, which had received positive feedback.
- A member of Pillory Barn had been working with the Tourism and Heritage Manager to update the Visit Gravesend website with more relevant content.
- A new digital survey had been created and was ready to be activated. This would be sent to Kent ambassadors, other external stakeholders, along with the local community. Once live, the results would be analysed and the design process would begin, to produce a compelling place brand/campaign, which would act as a tool kit to assist with PR, marketing in the future.

The Chair thanked Miranda Chapman for her presentation and invited the Committee to ask questions or to make comment.

- Members queried how long the digital survey would run for. Miranda Chapman explained that 3 weeks was usually deemed long enough, but this timeframe could be extended if responses were slow.
- There was concern regarding the future of the Gravesend/Tilbury ferry and the impact this may have on the place brand. The Assistant Director (Inclusive Growth) advised that a close eye was being kept on developments with the ferry service.
- However, in terms of place brand and what makes the area special, the river was front and centre and would continue to be.
- It was highlighted that a regular Uber boat service was on the horizon and leisure sailings have taken place/are planned.

The Chair acknowledged what a great shame it would be to lose the ferry service and asked for Member support in asking KCC councillors to reconsider their position on the matter.

- The Committee sought clarity regarding the benefit of place branding, in which Miranda Chapman explained that place branding provided Gravesham's Communications team with a PR marketing tool kit and a recognisable brand, which over time would create visual identity and provide bespoke content for communication channels.
- Over time the place branding success could be measured through social media metrics, publicity, volume of mentions in the national media, which all had a value. Miranda Chapman used a recent example of Folkestone & Hythe, who were mentioned in both Vogue and the onboard British Airways magazine in the first 6 months of using their bespoke place branding. A food influencer called Bitten Written had also covered a number of restaurants in the area.

The Assistant Director (Inclusive Growth) added that the quarterly Performance Report includes key performance indicators around footfall and visitor numbers. Analytics would also be tracked through the website.

- Promotional opportunities were also being scoped with Southeastern to promote Gravesham on the network.
- The Committee supported the promotion of the area outside the borough to bring visitors in, but also felt it was important to engage with those living within the borough. The Chair agreed that local confidence needed to be raised, which would hopefully change perspective, so there were challenges to be faced.
- The Assistant Director (Inclusive Growth) added that the digital survey would engage the local community as well as external stakeholders. He also noted that the recent window vinyls in the old Debenhams store had received positive feedback.
- It was expressed that Gravesham needed to be celebrated, but this must relate locally also.
- Members noted that Pocahontas was an important asset to Gravesham and should be promoted within the branding.

The Chair concluded that the funding had provided a great promotional boost and thanked both Miranda Chapman and the officers involved in bringing everything together.

It was requested that the item be returned to the committee in 6 months for an update on progress.

The Committee noted the report.

56. Economic Development update

The Assistant Director (Inclusive Growth) and Senior Economic Development Officer gave a presentation to the Committee which can be viewed on the following link:

[\(Public Pack\)Economic Development Update Agenda Supplement for Community & Leisure Cabinet Committee, 11/03/2024 19:30 \(gravesham.gov.uk\)](#)

- The Assistant Director (Inclusive Growth) gave some background explaining that Gravesham's economy had experienced strong gains over the last decade, however the local economy had seen low productivity, suggesting a lack of suitable employment opportunities locally. Household income was at its lowest in Gravesend and Northfleet.

- How the Council responded to this and supported residents was front and centre within the Corporate Plan. The emerging vision and objectives for the Business Gravesham strategy were also shared.
- Members were informed of the Big Conversation events, in line with the Community engagement strategy. The dates shown were TBC and would be firmed up in due course. The engagement proposed is a three-stage model involving in-person events, hyper-local engagement and digital engagement.
- Flyers for the hyper-local engagements would be sent to local businesses soon, inviting them to talk with officers.
- The Senior Economic Development Officer updated the Committee on some recent key funding wins. Out of 15 shortlisted projects, Gravesham had been successful in securing the SELEP Get Building Fund of £370K. This would be used to create tech hub flexible working spaces in vacant retail space at St George's Shopping Centre.

£35K of funding had also been obtained from Designated Funds National Highways. The vision was to create a green skills hub at Cascades which would specialise in construction and infrastructure. There was a demand for skills training in the local area and it was felt what could be created would add value, to what was already available. A study would be required to understand the feasibility of a Green Construction Skills Hub on the Cascades Leisure Centre Site. An updated on this initiative would be provided to the Members of the Committee in due course.

The Chair invited the Committee to ask questions or to make comment.

- Clarification was sought regarding the space the Green Construction Skills Hub would require at Cascades. The Assistant Director (Inclusive Growth) advised that this was part of the scope of the study but noted that proposals would need to work alongside the high quality leisure offer planned.
- There was concern that the hub could compromise the Leisure offer. The Chair noted there was a skills shortage and the hub would only be feasible, if it could be created to work alongside the leisure provision.
- Members queried how the local college would be involved with the suggested hub. The Senior Economic Development Officer explained that the college would work alongside Gravesham, with the Green Hub offering enrichment to students.
- It was observed by Members that colleges and students working with developments, offered invaluable opportunities and should be welcomed.
- Members commended the funding awards that had been achieved.
- It was queried how the new tech hub at St George's would be promoted to organisations and how this could in turn bring more business to the town centre. The Senior Economic Development Officer explained that the ambition was to work with a provider, who has a wider network for promotion. There had been some interest from external service providers already. It was also noted that with the funding being from central government, publicity was likely. It was hoped PR would follow on the back of such exposure.

The Assistant Director (Inclusive Growth) concluded by informing Members that a key next step was the process to find an operator for the tech hub at the St George's Centre and outlined the swift timeframe for delivery. He praised the team for their work and informed the Committee the recent significant funding awards would support the delivery of the high impact projects presented.

The Committee noted the report.

57. Arts & Culture Update

The Cultural Manager informed Members that the Council was in the last year of the Cultural Strategy and development had come along way. The Committee were presented with a video, highlighting key achievements throughout 2024/25 plus future visions. Elements of the video included funding achievements, art residencies, Sunday music sessions, enhancing and promotion of heritage workshops, the Light Festival and the summer programme to name a few.

The Chair commended the work of the team and praised the high footfall of the St George's Art Centre and investment achieved so far. She expressed the importance of creating a strong strategy for the next 5 years in order to take the offering to the next level.

The Chair invited the Committee to ask questions or to make comment.

- Members agreed this was a good news story and praised the work of the team and success of the St George's Art Centre.
- The Committee queried whether there had been much uptake from local businesses to provide space for the upcoming Fringe Festival in June. The Cultural Manager updated that there had been quite a few. She explained that the Art Council Funding application this year was to support new venues and was hopeful that new venues would be obtained. Promotion of the event was underway.
- Members asked for more information in relation to Club Yards Studio. The Cultural Manager informed Committee this was a venue based in May Avenue, Northfleet and located next to the Iron Pier. The venue was art studio space providing an area for artists to work. Part of the studio was available to local artists on a 3-month residency, with other sections of the space for commercial rental to all.

The Chair thanked the Cultural Manager for the update.

58. Corporate Performance Report: Q3 2023-24

The Assistant Director (Inclusive Growth) presented Committee with the Corporate Performance Report: Q3 2023-24. The purpose of the report was to provide Members with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the Council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter Three 2023-24 (October to December 2023).

Members of the Committee were informed the Council's performance reporting was set against performance indicators relating to Community and Leisure which were: Energised Economy, Skills Offer, Revitalised Town, Healthy Living, Supported Lives, Community Capital and Cultural Hub.

The Chair referred to performance indicators relating to Energised Economy and asked for clarification on the definition of knowledge economy. Assistant Director (Inclusive Growth) gave the Oxford Reference definition as *'The use of knowledge as the primary tool to produce new economic benefits or maximise existing ones'*. This would include skills such as computing, media, medicine and other knowledge gained at a higher level of education. The

Chair acknowledged that in terms of creative business withing Kent, Gravesham was not performing at its best and needed to grow.

In relation to 'Revitalised Town' the Assistant Director (Inclusive Growth) acknowledged that:

- Occupancy rates were slightly lower than the national average.
- There had been changes to opening hours at St George's Centre car park and these would be advertised.

The Assistant Director (Inclusive Growth) updated the Committee in respect of the Supported Lives and public health programme. There was work underway with ICP regarding funding that may be available. The Head of Service (Community Support) explained that the youth contract was commissioned by KCC to the Grand. When funding stopped it was moved into a new family brand model. Programme one was a new public health programme to help people understand what help is available to them. Two specific performance indicators related to this which were the number of people signposted to support and the percentage of participants from minority groups.

The Chair highlighted that crucial areas of support were dementia care, maternity support for women of minority groups and the spike in suicides in the Sikh community. She asked if local public health initiatives could be on the next agenda.

The Chair invited the Committee to ask questions or to make comment.

- Members queried where data was drawn from, in order to drive the initiative forward as these were national issues. The Assistant Director (Inclusive Growth) advised that the information comes from a range of sources and local statistics could be drilled down further into Wards, to see the issues corelated with deprived areas.

The Committee noted the report.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 9:10pm