

Social Affairs Select – Report of a Meeting held on 21st June 2012

1. SENCIO

The meeting was held at Lullingstone Park and was preceded by a tour of the golf course and the depot accompanied by Mark Whyman, Chief Executive of Sencio.

Members were considering aspects of ‘Strong and Active Communities’ looking at leisure facilities and the work of the Stag Community Arts Centre.

Sencio offers a wide range of leisure facilities to cater for diverse interests and abilities across all age groups. Golf and Fitness facilities are proving to be growth areas despite the recession whilst swimming continues to show a slight decline, in line with the national trend. Mr Whyman explained that Sencio’s strength lay in its staff and that investing in their training and ensuring that its buildings and equipment were well maintained were of paramount importance. Innovation, such as the introduction of a Youth Membership Scheme and working with partners such as West Kent Extra and Dorton House were also key elements of its philosophy. The organisation is constantly seeking new ways of engaging the public in healthy activities and works closely with the Council to deliver the relevant aims set out in the Community Plan.

2. STAG COMMUNITY ARTS CENTRE

Cllr. Eyre, in his capacity as general Manager of STAG talked about the different ways in which the Centre serves the community. He spoke of the army of volunteers who are central to its success and the provision of services, marketing specific interest groups with the introduction, for instance, of a Mother and Baby Film Club and a Classic Film Club. Whilst these attract relatively small audiences they nevertheless meet a need and are well received. The Centre works closely with the Amateur groups within the community as well as bringing in professional performances. It also provides a significant outreach programme working with schools across the District and offering workshop sessions for the highly successful Youth Theatre. Members were informed about the Youth Café and the intention to provide a confidential room where youngsters can receive help and advice.

3. DISTRICT COUNCIL INPUT.

These presentations were followed by an account of the many ways in which the District Council promotes and supports ‘strong and active communities’. These range from the Healthy Walks initiative to Speed Watch and from Consultation days to developing a scheme - Up and Running - to help reduce mental health problems. It is remarkable what can be achieved on a shoestring when organisations pool their resources and work together to achieve those things which can make a difference to people’s daily lives and well being.

4. OLYMPIC UPDATE

Members were advised about various arrangements for the Paralympic games and the training sessions leading up to that event at Brands Hatch between 5th – 8th September. It is anticipated that some 225 athletes will be competing in the road cycling event.

The Council has to manage a host of requirements to ensure the good management of spectators, good liaison with various stakeholders and the local community, the provision of toilet facilities, first aid and cleaning the road and track to name but a few.

Around 200 volunteers have been recruited, all of whom will need to be trained by Council officers and a Crowd Management company has been engaged to provide additional support.

It is hoped that in addition to a memorable few days that both the local economy and residents of West Kingsdown will benefit from this event.

There was also an update on the Olympic Torch Relay which will pass through parts of the District on 20th July.

Officers have put in a huge amount of time and effort into ensuring the smooth running of these events. The Council should be proud of them and grateful for their hard work and dedication.

Alison Cook

Chairman