

Cllr Lesley Dyball
People & Places
Report to Scrutiny Committee
14 July 2020

Since March 2020, the Council we has been responding to the challenges of COVID-19, and planning for recovery in the months ahead. We have worked closely with our partners across the district to respond to significant changes, especially working on how we can protect and maintain critical services to protect and support citizens.

Our COVID-19 response

- Council investment of £100k towards community based initiatives supporting COVID-19 pandemic awarded additional grants to the value of £19,000 to Age UK, Friends for Families, West Kent Mind, Cross Light Advice and Sevenoaks Counselling.
- The Communities team has supported the district's Care for our Community volunteers scheme, helping those who need support (such as befriending, errands or shopping) or wanting to volunteer to register. To date the scheme has over 1,400 volunteers and seen more than 1,400 new requests for support from some of our most vulnerable households.
- Raised £12,205 as part of Sevenoaks District Communities Together fundraising page for four local charities.
- The Local Strategic Partnership has supported GoCoach to launch the first demand led public transport system in the country. At a time when most areas had completely shut down public transport, Go2 provided a safe transport offer to those who need to access services, shops and hospitals etc. It has particularly benefitted key workers including NHS staff and Police Community Safety Officers. More than 500 passengers used the service within the first 8 days of operating.
- COVID-19 Recovery plans in place for the Economy and Communities.
- Provided funding to launch Kent & Medway Growth Hub advice line for COVID-19 business and grant support.
- Government funding has helped us provide grant funding to those businesses that need support. As at 5 June 2020, as part of the Small business & retail, hospitality and leisure grant funds, the Council has made payment to 1,778 businesses to a total of £21.86m in relief and grants. This accounts for approximately 85% of all eligible businesses and 88% of the £24.7m of funding allocated to us by Government. £10k grants from the Small Business Grant Fund have been paid to each of 1,285 eligible businesses, totalling £12.85m. £10k grants from the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund have been paid to 221 eligible businesses, totalling £2.21m. Grants up to £25k from the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund has been paid to 272 eligible businesses, totalling £6.8m.
- Launched the Sevenoaks District Business Advisory Board to gather business insight and understand the challenges and opportunities facing businesses.

Community Plan:

Key issues emerging from the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) include:

- Performance is 96% on target. There has been a slight increase in the number of people killed or seriously injured on local roads. As road safety is overseen by Kent Fire and Rescue, the LSP will meet with them to discuss road safety initiatives and campaigns.

- Looking to grow the supported internship network through the LSP. The K&M CCG, West Kent MIND and West Kent Housing are interested in the scheme. The scheme has been suspended during the lockdown as Broomhill Bank is closed. We are working to establish what the scheme might look like when restrictions are eased and both Sevenoaks District Council and Broomhill Bank school are committed to continuing to develop the programme.

Safeguarding:

- A Members safeguarding handbook has been produced and distributed to all Members to raise awareness of the key safeguarding issues that they need to be aware of. A safeguarding training session can be organised for members if there is interest.
- Through the internal Safeguarding Group, we are now looking to develop a council wide safeguarding report system to improve reporting, auditing processes and improve risk management.

Community Safety:

- The Community Safety Strategy and action plan refreshed for 2020-21.
- National Internet Safety Day was on Tuesday 4 February. SDC and CSP held an event for all primary schools at the Stag Theatre, on how to stay safe and have fun online Dreams2020 delivered a workshop for Years 5 & 6 and over 200 pupils from 15 schools attended
- SDC and partner agencies were successful in two Crown Court prosecutions against a rogue landlord and property owners of the Convent of Mercy site in Swanley. This resulted in convictions and the payment of fines.
- Over 15 Task and Finish Groups established in the past 12 months, looking at incidents where ASB has been reported more than a couple of times. The groups bring together the relevant agencies to take a joint response.
- The CSP Annual report for 2019-20 highlights the successes of the CSU and all the work that has been achieved. This report is available for all members
- Daily Tasking has continued and Task Groups continuing virtually
- There has been an increase in anti-social behaviour in beauty hotspots. The CSU are visiting 15 locations across the District and are meeting weekly with partners actions include:-
 - Kent Fire Rescue Service doing regular patrol
 - PCSOs and Community Policing Team to visit to all locations
 - KCC detached youth work and West Kent Extra youth work to happen when realised
 - Site locations with owners to see what can be put in place
 - Wildlife cameras where suitable
 - Kenward Trust to visit areas where nitrous oxide is reported

Issues and Challenges

- The Community Safety Partnership receives annual funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). This has continued for 2020-21.
- COVID-19 has seen some challenges with people gathering in open spaces or round people's houses. Police have made a number of visits and the CSU have issued a number of warning letters followed up by Police who can issue tickets.
- Daily Tasking have still been taking place so that no issues are missed and although face to face work including joint visits have not been made actions have still been taken forward.

Youth Services:

- Family Fun Days had to be cancelled in 2020 due to COVID-19 but we will be back in 2021
- A Youth Assembly has been set up by KCC and supported by the council and West Kent Extra - young people have decided on their priorities and action plan for the district. The Assembly has met in January and March this year.
- KCC has increased their street base work from 1 night to 4 nights a week from 1 April 2020 and the CSU works in partnership with them regarding target areas to visit. However again this has seen a delay. There have been a lot of work with young people via Zoom and other social media platforms
- Youth Zone is lent out to Sevenoaks Area Youth Trust and West Kent Extra.

Leisure:

- White Oak Leisure Centre planning application approved in February 2020.
- In April, Council approved investment of £20m into the design and build of the new White Oak leisure centre and appointment of a new operator. The contractor started work on site in May 2020.
- Officers are continuing to work with Sencio across all their sites, alongside local clubs.

Community Grants:

- All grant applications have been appraised for 2020-21 and approved by Cabinet at March Cabinet.

Issues and Challenges

- As always a number of applications exceeding grant amount, but SDC has a robust review process.

Communities & Sports:

- Voluntary and Community Forum has been established, chaired by Angela Painter.
- Meetings have been held with Edenbridge & Westerham Citizens Advice and Sevenoaks Citizens Advice to look at more joint working and SLA has been reviewed.
- The Dunton Green project completed on 30 March 2020. Over 5 years, 7 new community groups have been established and one-off engagement sessions e.g. art mural, Family Days, Bike Trials.

Economic Development:

- Continue to offer Team Around Your Business support to businesses across the District helping them access Council services
- Offering free business support to help businesses through West Kent Partnership (open to any business in West Kent Area) - delivered remotely during lockdown
- West Kent Jobs and Training Fair held on 5 March 2020 in Sevenoaks. Over 100 job seekers attended
- Assisting local housing associations and partners to create local jobs club launched prior to lockdown, service being delivered remotely
- Small Business Saturday event took place in Sevenoaks Town Centre with the bus visiting and meeting with a number of local companies focussing mainly on independent retailers to encourage people to shop local
- Support offered for Rural village shops via the Kent rural retailers programme, this offered specific advice from a rural retail specialist.

- Swanley Station renovation programme fully funded bringing a £2.25 million investment into the station.

West Kent Partnership:

The Partnership represents the economic needs of the area and engages with businesses on key issues for them.

Current Projects and success

- West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network - National programme, tailored and delivered locally in partnership with Careers & Enterprise Company. Two Enterprise Coordinators employed at SDC working across West Kent developing strategic relationships with schools and then matching them with a senior level business volunteer who helps provide strategic direction on careers strategy and practical support by linking schools with business to generate a motivated talent pipeline for local businesses
- West Kent Scale Up - 12 month coaching programme for 12 high growth West Kent businesses, involving 36 hour support and peer activities - delivered through Kent Invicta Chamber for Commerce and jointly funded by WKP, South East Business Boost and Growth Hub.
- Retail support programme was scoped for delivery from April with delivery by Action for Rural Communities in Kent. Currently on hold and will be re-framed to best support retailers at an appropriate time and in the light of other support, both National and Regional which becomes available

Issues and challenges

- Ensuring partnership is engaged with needs of local business. Providing appropriate business support to West Kent businesses to aid them in the recovery phase from Covid-19 and beyond.
- Reviewing West Kent Economic Priorities for Growth 2019-22 to reflect the changed circumstances and adjusting the action plan accordingly

West Kent LEADER:

West Kent LEADER is a European Union (EU) funded programme providing grants to local rural businesses to support the rural economy. To date 55 projects in West Kent have benefited, creating over 70 jobs, with a total grant commitment of nearly £1.8m. 18 businesses in Sevenoaks District have benefitted from a share of this funding, which will create over 25 jobs in the rural area.

Issues and challenges

- The current funding programme was due to end March 2020, with projects supported and delivered up to March 2021. Impacted by COVID-19, with many projects currently on hold and six month extensions granted. Further guidance is awaited from DEFRA. Currently it is not clear what the future funding for the rural economy will be post Brexit. Further funding opportunities are being sought.

Tourism:

Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership (DVCRP)

- Appointment of a Community Rail Officer.
- Partnership working with Town and Parish Councils continues and regular Steering Group meetings take place every 2-3 months. Subsequent partnership has been formed with Southeastern trains.

Visitor Economy Forum

- Visitor Economy Forum held in February attracting key tourism providers from the district as well as representatives from; Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), Association of Community Rail Partnerships and Visit Britain.

Visitor itineraries

- 4 itineraries have been developed; 7 of the most Instagrammable spots in Sevenoaks, A car-free short break near London, An active family getaway near London, A romantic weekend break near London for history lovers. Itineraries will feature on the tourism website, social media platforms and via existing partnerships.

London Gatwick

- The partnership looks at shared destination marketing in Gatwick Airport terminals - with links to local destination sites such as Penshurst Place.