

PEOPLE & PLACES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2020 commencing at 3.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Collins (Chairman)

Cllr. Pett (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Dr. Canet, Cheeseman, Coleman, P. Darrington, Dyball, Foster, Hudson, Osborne-Jackson and Raikes

An apology for absence was received from Cllr. Perry Cole

Cllrs. Clayton and Grint were also present.

42. Urgent Items

In accordance with Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chairman agreed to accept the urgent matters 'Covid-19 - Draft Economic Recovery Plan and Actions', 'Covid-19 - Draft Communities Recovery Plan and Actions', 'Reopening the High Street Safely', 'Supporting the Recovery of Leisure in the District' and 'Supporting the Recovery of Culture in the District' which had been circulated but had missed the statutory despatch deadline.

The matters were urgent as decisions were required which, if not made at the next meeting of, would significantly delay the provision of support to businesses, leisure, and culture in recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The urgent matters were taken as Agenda Items 11, 13, 14, 15 and 16.

43. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the People & Places Advisory Committee held on 3 March 2020, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

44. Declarations of interest

Councillor Raikes declared that for Minute 58, he was a Town Council Member and a Trustee of The Stag therefore he would leave the meeting for consideration of that item and not take part in the debate or voting thereon.

Councillor Dr Canet declared that for Minute 58, she was a Town Council Member and a Trustee of The Stag, therefore she would not take part in voting on the item but would remain in the room.

Councillor Osborne-Jackson declared that for Minute 57, he had a relative who worked for Sencio, therefore he would leave the meeting for consideration of that item and not take part in debate or voting thereon.

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Although not a Member of the Committee, with reference to Minute 58, Councillor Clayton declared that he was a Town Council Member and a Trustee of The Stag.

For transparency, Councillors Dyball, Hudson, Pett and Raikes declared that they were appointed Council representatives for the Sevenoaks District Arts Council.

45. Actions from Previous Meeting

The Community Projects & Funding Officer had circulated the predicated lifespan of the new leisure centre to Members on 9 June 2020.

46. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder advised that since the beginning of lockdown, there had been a rise in Covid-19 related anti-social behaviour and substance misuse within the District. This included an incident at Lullingstone Castle. There had been four traveller incursions including Otford and Hextable. Black Lives Matter protests had been taking place peacefully at Eynsford and the Vine in Sevenoaks where both had police presence.

The contractor, ISG, had started work on White Oak Leisure Centre on 26 May with Covid-19 control measures in place to ensure safe working on site. Site hoarding had been set up and artwork would be installed on it. An accessible ramp and walkway had been formed so there was safe access to the existing leisure centre. As the existing leisure centre would be operational while the new one would be built, parking would be reduced. The parking would have disabled bays and coach drop off points clearly marked. A temporary entrance for deliveries and careful scheduling had been put in place to minimise disturbance to neighbours. An interest in a site visit to Orchard Academy was expressed at the previous meeting but the site had been closed from lockdown.

Many within the District had been volunteering in response to the pandemic. While there was an increase in volunteer power, as lockdown restrictions were released, there were plans to develop a volunteering legacy going forward. The Voluntary Sector Forum had been meeting regularly. At the meetings, they had hosted presenters covering topics such as sector resilience and promoting volunteering opportunities.

Lockdown had impacted events within the District. Silver Sunday would largely be online interactive sessions. All family fun days in the year had been cancelled. Virtual workshops had taken place online for mental health awareness week online. The Youth Forum would also take place online.

Following concerns from Members that older people within the district with limited access to the internet may be excluded from Silver Sunday, the Portfolio Holder advised that magazines and booklets would be made available as well as the online support.

47. Referral from Cabinet or the Audit committee

There were none.

CHANGE IN ORDER OF AGENDA ITEMS

The Chairman, with the Committee's agreement, moved agenda item 9 forward with agenda items 6, 7, 8 and 10 to follow respectively.

48. Presentation from DAVSS

The Chairman welcomed Henu Cummins, the Chief Executive Officer for the Domestic Abuse Volunteer Support Services (DAVSS). The Chief Executive Officer outlined the charity's work to protect victims from domestic violence. Members were advised that DAVSS was a small independent charity which provided support for men and women experiencing domestic abuse in West Kent.

The Chief Executive Officer advised that most of the work was carried out by volunteers which included a range of services including legal advice which was free and confidential as well as courses and programs to schools. It was important to the charity that the services provided were not time limited. From April 2019 to April 2020 there were over 1000 referrals which involved over 1300 children. Since the beginning of lockdown there had been higher demands for services resulting in the helpline hours being extended.

In response to queries, Members were advised that staff and volunteers at DAVSS received support through a direct line they were able to contact to talk about their experiences helping victims. Amongst staff and volunteers, many spoke multiple languages so they could communicate with victims who do not speak English as their first language. A sign language interpreter was available for any deaf victims seeking help.

In response to queries on what work was done with perpetrators, the Chief Executive Officer advised that DAVSS primarily supported victims, but any perpetrators who had reached out were referred to the Kent Community Domestic Abuse Program. Furthermore, DAVSS programs in schools included educating young people on attitudes towards abuse to prevent them from becoming perpetrators in the future.

Resolved: That the presentation be noted.

49. Presentation on the Visitor Economy

The Economic Development, Tourism and Property Support Officer gave a [presentation](#) providing an overview of the Visitor Economy to date, including the work that was in development as a result of COVID-19. Members were updated on business support, partnerships and the Visitor Economy Forum.

Resolved: That the presentation on the Visitor Economy be noted

50. Community Grants Proposal for 2021/22

The Community Safety Manager presented the report outlining the approach to be taken for the Community Grant Scheme going forward and the Sevenoaks District Sports and Arts Councils for awards made for the period April 2021 to March 2022.

Members were advised that the Community Grants Scheme applications for the 2021/22 grants would be submitted online for the first time. With effect from April

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2021, the provision of funding to the Sevenoaks District Sports and Arts Councils would be removed from the Community Grants Scheme. Instead, Service Level Agreements (SLAs) would be agreed with provision of £2,500 to each Council for the delivery of their services. This would allow the Sevenoaks District Sports and Arts Councils to not have to go through uncertainty of the grant process which would help enhance working relationships with the Council and maintain delivery of sports and arts funding across the District.

Members welcomed the move of grant applications to online but expressed concerns that some smaller organisations may have trouble accessing it. The Community Safety Manager advised they would receive assistance filling in the form from the Council if requested.

Members expressed concerns that the terms in the draft SLA for the Sevenoaks District Arts Council were too ambiguous and required refining before a final agreement would be made.

Resolved: That

- a) the approach taken to the Community Grant Scheme going forward and the Sevenoaks District Sports and Arts Councils for awards made for the period April 2021 to March 2022, be considered.
- b) officers work with the Sevenoaks District Arts Council to review the terms of the Service Level Agreement.

51. Sevenoaks District Community Safety Strategy & Action Plan annual report 2019-20

The Community Safety Manager presented the report, highlighting the work of the Community Safety Partnership throughout 2019-20. Members were advised that the Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership achieved 98% of actions in the action plan during 2019-20.

In response to queries on travellers incursions, the Community Safety Manager advised that a guide pack for all Town and Parish Councils had been done in partnership with them around how to deal with incursions. Neighbouring Borough/District councils also would e-mail Councils across Kent if they have had traveller incursions close to the border of the District.

In response to questions on social distancing, Members were advised that guidance on social distancing was provided by police to large groups who gathered outside. There had been collaboration with youth workers to help with social distancing measures.

Resolved: That the Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership's Annual Report for 2019-20, be noted.

52. Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership - Nitrous Oxide use & ASB Action Plan

The Community Safety Manager presented the report which outlined the action plan put in place to address Anti-Social Behaviour and Nitrous Oxide use in locations across the District.

There had been a rise in reports from various locations regarding young people taking Nitrous Oxide canisters causing litter and anti-social behaviour. A task and finish group had been set up and met on 1 June to devise the action plan. It would be monitored at daily briefings and weekly meetings were being held.

Actions included site visits, installation of wildlife cameras, police patrolling of the relevant locations and circulation of a video to schools educating young people of the dangers of Nitrous Oxide. As Nitrous Oxide was currently legal, there had been contact with trading standards on what could be done to regulate the selling of it. The task and finish group were likely to keep meeting until the end of September.

Following queries from Members, the Community Safety Manager advised that wildlife cameras cost roughly £60 to install. Members were also advised that Nitrous Oxide was accessible to young people as it could be purchased in bulk online.

Members expressed an interest in lobbying local Members of Parliament on Nitrous Oxide trading standards in order to have stricter regulations.

Resolved: That the action plan, be noted.

CHANGE IN ORDER OF AGENDA ITEMS

The Chairman, with the Committee's agreement, moved agenda item 13 forward with agenda items 11, 17, 14, 15, 16 and 12 to follow respectively.

53. COVID19 - Draft Economic Recovery Plan and Actions

The Chief Officer for People & Places gave a [presentation](#) on the preparations made for economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Resolved: That the presentation be noted.

54. Sevenoaks District Business Advisory Board

The Economic Development Officer presented the report which informed Members of the steps taken to establish the Sevenoaks District Business Advisory Board following the coronavirus lockdown.

The Business Advisory Board would be a joint private and public sector venture, led by the Council. It would include a variety of business sectors and sizes in its membership with representation from businesses across the district. The Business Advisory Board would provide insight from the business community in the district on current issues, trading conditions, opportunities and constraints.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

55. Reopening High Streets Safely Fund

The Chief Officer for People & Places presented the report and gave a [presentation](#) which outlined the Reopening High Street Safely Fund (RHSSF) which would provide the Council with access to an allocated fund of up to £107,106 from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to put in place measures to establish a safe trading environment for businesses and customers.

The fund would cover support to develop an action plan, communications activity, activities to raise awareness to businesses on how to be managed safely and temporary public realm changes. The fund would not cover capital expenditure, grants to businesses or already committed expenditure.

Following queries from Members on restricting traffic in the high street, the Chief Officer for People & Places advised that Kent County Council Highway Authority would make a final decision. With further questions raised on whether on street hand sanitisers could be set up in rural areas with many tourists, the Chief Officer for People & Places advised that could be arranged if parish or town councils ask for the support.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund and proposed action plan, be noted.

56. COVID19 - Draft Communities Recovery Plan and Actions

The Chief Officer for People & Places gave a [presentation](#) on the preparations made for community recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Resolved: That the presentation be noted.

57. Supporting the Recovery of Leisure in the District

The Chief Officer for People & Places presented the report which outlined the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the leisure industry and set out a request from Sencio Community Leisure for financial assistance to mitigate financial difficulties related to Government's temporary closure of all leisure facilities due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Sencio was forced to suspend all direct debits and memberships due to lockdown closures. During closures, Sencio had followed guidance on essential maintenance on leisure facilities including the water treatment and filter cleansing of swimming pools. Leisure operators are facing particular challenges accessing Government support during the pandemic and are largely ineligible for emergency response packages.

The gym and fitness industry will have a vital role in ensuring the ongoing health and wellbeing of the district following the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions.

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Sencio had commenced recovery work in line with national strategy. It is predicted it could take 8-12 months for leisure trusts to recover. Sencio's Recovery Business Plans were based on the leisure centres opening on a phased approach from 5 July 2020. A 10 month period for income to recover, starting at 30% of previous levels and achieving 80% by the end of the financial year had been projected. This was based on restrictions to their services to ensure the safety of staff and customers. Marketing campaigns would be in place to promote health and wellbeing as well as provide reassurance to customers on health and safety provision. Training for staff on new safe working procedures would be provided.

Sencio is confident that their recovery business plan will enable them to fully recover over the next 10 months, subject to Government's awaited guidance on reopening leisure centres and social distancing requirements

Sencio had asked the Council to consider the following:

- To extend the current payment holiday on Sencio's loan repayments to the Council by a further 3 months to September 2020.
- To provide a loan of up to £120,000 over the next 3 months towards essential utility costs. The loan would be interest free, but with the stipulation that it would be paid back to the Council in financial year 2021/22.

The Chief Officer for People & Places clarified that in part a) of the recommendation as set out in the report, it should read that the extension would be to 30 September 2020.

Members expressed concerns over part b) of the recommendation as set out in the report, including doubts that members of the public would return to using leisure centres due to personal financial strain. In response to queries over lack of data from Sencio and the impact on the new leisure centre in White Oak, the Chief Officer for People & Places advised that Sencio were confident in their recovery plans, which fall in line with Government guidance to the leisure industry.

Members highlighted from the report that due to lack of firm guidance on re-opening leisure centres from the Government, it would be difficult to assess the level of risk associated with loans to Sencio with high levels of accuracy, and therefore the Council should be prepared to potentially burden the costs in full. The Chief Officer for People & Places advised that Sencio's golf club reopened on 1 June 2020, with the leisure centres opening on a phased approach from 5 July 2020 in line with emerging Government guidance.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that

- a) the information provided in the report, financial implications and risk assessments on the request for an extension to the current payment

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holiday on Sencio's loan repayments to the Council by a further 3 months to 30 September 2020, be considered; and

- b) should Cabinet agree to part b) of the recommendation as set out in the report, the loan would be interest free with the stipulation that it would be paid back to the Council in the financial year 2021/22. If the loan is not paid within the repayment period, any outstanding balance would accrue and be charged a rate of 6% interest with effect from April 2022.

(Having declared an interest, Cllr Osborne-Jackson left the room during consideration of this item and did not take part in the debate or voting thereon.)

58. Supporting the Recovery of Culture in the District

The Chief Officer for People & Places presented the report which outlined the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the culture industry and sets out a request from Sevenoaks Town Council for financial assistance to mitigate current financial difficulties related to the closure of The Stag due to coronavirus outbreak.

The culture sector across the country has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Stag had been closed since 21 March 2020. No grants had been supplied by Government for theatres and Government briefings have suggested that the theatres and cinemas would be one of the last sectors to re-open.

Although there had not yet been any Government guidance or timelines on the re-opening of theatres and cinemas, The Stag had commenced work to identify the impact of re-opening and reshaping the business. The plan was based on social distancing measures, seeking external capital input, investigating the cost and feasibility of the auditorium to show film, safe working practices, marketing campaigns to reassure customers of health and safety provision, and training for staff on new safe working procedures.

Sevenoaks Town Council asked the Council to consider the following:

- To make available to Sevenoaks Town Council access to draw down from a Council load of up to £220,000 over the next 8 months towards The Stag's essential recovery, building security, liability insurance and utility costs. The loan would be interest free with the stipulation that it would be paid back to the Council in financial year 2021/22. If the loan is not paid within the repayment period, any outstanding balance would accrue and be charged a rate of 6% interest with effect from April 2022.

Following queries from Members, the Chief Officer for People & Places advised that The Stag is able to receive business support and guidance from the Council. It was highlighted from the report that it was advised that any financial assistance to The Stag from the Council should safeguard the recovery of the loan by making it conditional on Sevenoaks Town Council entering an agreement to meet the costs of the loan payments and identify how this would be achieved.

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Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that

- a) the information provided in the report, the financial implications and risk assessment on the request to make available to Sevenoaks Town Council, a Council loan of up to £220,000 over the next 8 months towards essential recovery, maintenance and utility costs, be considered; and
- b) the loan would be interest free with the stipulation that it would be paid back to the Council in financial year 2021/22. If the loan is not paid within the repayment period, any outstanding balance will accrue and be charged a rate of 6% interest with effect from April 2022.

(Having declared an interest, Cllr Raikes left the room during consideration of this item and did not take part in the debate or voting thereon. Having declared an interest, Cllr Dr Canet did not take part in voting but remained in the room.)

59. Work Plan

The work plan was noted. Three items on Silver Sunday, Covid-19 Recovery and End of Year Community Grants were added to the work plan for the next meeting along with an update on the Public Realm in December 2020.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 6.52 PM

CHAIRMAN