

Item OS 20/16 referred from Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 27 August 2020

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the support provided by the Borough Council to the community and business sector during the coronavirus pandemic. Measures included the establishment of a Community Hub to assist residents in need of additional support, with a focus on those on the NHS extremely vulnerable 'shielded' list. Business support activity included the distribution of grant funding, information sharing and the establishment of a county wide Covid-19 Helpline.

Members commended the support provided to the community, local businesses and residents by the Borough Council and its staff. The valuable role of voluntary organisations and volunteers during the pandemic was also recognised.

In addition, Members took the opportunity to consider the Borough Council's ongoing response and reviewed preparations for any potential local outbreak or second wave. It was reported that the operation of the Community Hub and other support measures, including the Covid-19 helpline, could be reinstated at short notice if required.

Particular reference was made to the work undertaken by the Borough Council's One You team in offering support to those struggling with social isolation and loneliness. As part of the recovery process, the team would focus on mental health and general wellbeing and support residents with healthy lifestyle advice and facilitating discussions to aid positive mental health. However, Members expressed concern around the funding arrangements with Kent County Council, especially given the significant financial challenges faced by the Borough Council and it was hoped that this position would be revisited at a future Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In response, the Chief Executive assured Members that work was currently in hand to ensure that the costs of the One You service reflected the funding received from Kent County Council. There was also uncertainty around the position of Public Health England and there was potential for the situation to change.

The report referred to the Economic Regeneration Strategy 2019-2023 and highlighted that the plans in place to support the local economy would need to be reviewed to ensure that resources were focused on the area's most in need. Potential measures included a focus on upskilling and employment, supporting green growth and investment and the future of the High Street, as detailed in paragraph 1.3.7 of the report.

The Borough Council also participated in a District and Community 'cell', a sub-group of a Recovery Coordinating Group, which was considering wider and longer term impacts upon Kent and Medway.

Finally, the financial and value for money considerations set out at 1.5 of the report were discussed and it was noted that the Borough Council had received approximately £1.4M from Government to fund the Covid-19 response. However, it was unclear whether this would be sufficient to cover the cost of all the support measures provided or the significant loss of income. Work on financial modelling continued.

RECOMMENDED: That



- (1) the reinstatement of all Community Hub support in the event of a second wave or regional/local lockdown be endorsed;
- (2) the reinstatement of business support in the event of a second wave or regional/local lockdown be endorsed;
- (3) the ongoing commitment to the District and Community Recovery cell to aid support to the local community be endorsed;
- (4) the suggested amendments (highlighted in paragraph 1.3.7 of the report) regarding revisions to the Economic Regeneration Strategy to support businesses and the local economy be endorsed.

***Referred to Cabinet**