

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 3 November 2021

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Sarah Mead (Chair), Margaret Notley (Vice-Chair), Myla Arceno, Stephen Booth, Alex Farquharson, Claire Parris and Simon Speller.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 06:00 pm
End Time: 08:26 pm

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies were received from Councillors Matt Creasey and Liz Harrington.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - 21 SEPTEMBER 2021**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of Community Select Committee meeting held on Wednesday 29 September 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 **HCC DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH PRESENTATION**

The Director of Public Health for Hertfordshire updated the Select Committee on Covid-19. He advised Members that generally Stevenage had more interest in testing compared to other areas in Hertfordshire.

He provided the following key updates to the Committee:

- England came out of lockdown on June 19 2020, and the number cases rose again. Currently the virus was surging, but cases rate were dropping.
- The highest rate of infection was among the 14 year old age group. There were also a few cases in the 80s and 90s age groups, most of them believed to be vulnerable and unvaccinated. The numbers of cases were also slightly higher in the working age groups, people who were in their 30s and 40s.
- For Stevenage there were no death from Coronavirus between May and September 2021.
- The NHS was under a huge strain. The number of cases surged again after the half term, and the hospital admissions were up and surging with mechanical and ventilation beds occupancy going up again, in particular, it spiked in the last fortnight.
- Stevenage had been in the top 3 for the vaccine uptake in the County.

- The uptake rate was 88.3% for 60 year olds for their second jab. Bedwell had the lowest vaccine uptake in Stevenage.
- It was not known yet how long the vaccine immunity would last, and that the vaccine immunity protects but not all variants.

Members asked questions and the following answers were provided by the Director of Public Health:

- The anti-vaccine groups were minor and they were not winning. He advised the Committee that £30K was spent on marshals for outside schools to keep disturbance by the group away. The Internet was the main source of the misinformation, and this was provided by the people from outside the UK.
- There would likely be one of the following three scenarios in the next few months:
 - The virus would likely to mutate and go away.
 - Likely to remain endemic like Measles with vaccines and boosters.
 - New variants every so often.
- The government and local authorities needed to work more closely. Local authorities were at the forefront of the test and trace services. The Hertfordshire County Council had to bring back their own Health Protection Team, as they could not rely on the national agencies.
- The Director described long Covid as a complex disease which could last between few weeks to over a year. It could have psychological impact on the patient. It would also impact the respiratory system, heart and mobility problems.
- Financial help was also provided to communities to support them through the Covid19 pandemic.
- The booster jabs take up was 60 percent nationally and 54 percent for Hertfordshire.
- He suggested people could go to walk-in centres for booster jabs without an appointment, as primary care was under huge pressure and it was not sourced enough.
- Face mask did help containing the virus not just the vaccines.
- The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) did not recommend vaccines for under 11s, and likely that herd immunity would happen in the those age groups. There was strong evidence and benefits involved for vaccinating 12-15 years old age groups.
- There were still studies that needed to be done on children and the vaccine impact on them. 60 children died in the last six months in the UK.
- Lateral Flow Test (LFT) was not 100% perfect, and the result for it normally showed the level of infection, even if it's negative, you could still be infectious, on the other hand, Polymerase Chain Reaction Test (PCR) was sensitive and intended to have negative results when viral load was low, however, frequent testing were needed to mitigate the risk.
- Children symptoms included diarrhoea, severe inflammatory syndrome and other general illness.
- Virus mutation could often happen, but some variants were more infectious than others. Delta was one of them. Currently there was a focus on the transmissibility rather than the lethality.

Children had been put into difficult situations where and when rules changes and restrictions in school was different to restrictions out of school. Children were confused and afraid when restrictions were lifted as there was no explanation for this. The Chair asked Director of Public Health to consider the ongoing effect on children's mental health and do whatever he could to help them. The Director of Public Health showed an example of a mental health online service for children and invited Stevenage to bid for funding should they wish to put together a similar project.

Director of Public Health agreed to provide update on which service areas were hit by the Covid19 pandemic, and details of the work would be circulated to Members outside of this meeting.

The chair thanked the Director of Public Health for the presentation and for the hard work his Team had done during the pandemic.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update on Covid19 be noted.

4 **UPDATE ON REVIEW OF NEW TOWNS HERITAGE CENTRE**

Members provided feedback on their recent visit to Colchester Firstsite Arts Gallery/Community Hub and Colchester Castle, and suggested that some autonomy should be given to a future Heritage Centre for having an independent website and digital presence.

The Assistant Director for Communities and Neighbourhoods advised Members that he agreed that there should be some curative autonomy which could be linked to the Council through a micro-site. A strong connection between the Heritage Centre and the Council would benefit residents. He also mentioned that he would look further into the website options. It would be possible to explore a small project funding bid to the Arts Council or other funders to pilot a digital platform, similar to Bristol and this could form part of the Museum work plan for next year.

In response to a question, the Strategic Director advised Members that there is an element of funding available for the New Towns Heritage Centre, but not for the whole project, all funding options would be explored including funding for the digital infrastructure that needed financing. The website model could fit into the business case before it was proposed to the Development Board in February 2022. The Assistant Director, Communities and Neighbourhoods advised Members that there could be a separate community project bid, regardless of the main Towns Deal bid for the Hub building. This would help with work towards a £10 - 20K digital solutions including a website and QR codes around a 'museum without walls' concept, and could include a lot of stakeholders support for this bid which would likely be well received.

Members noted that there were already historical resources for the project such as the Story of Stevenage in 100 objects, and it could be an interesting attraction point to welcome people from the all over the world. Members agreed that there should be a clear vision before Council explore funding options and have strong scope to make a strong case for funding.

Members suggested that there could be a hub and spoke model linked to the Co-operative Neighbourhoods Management model, including the physical museum building, digital archives, museums without walls and other historical heritage like the Fairlands Valley farm house.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director for Communities and Neighbourhoods and his Team for the work they and Community Select Committee Members have done on the project.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update on the review of the New Towns Heritage Centre be noted.

5 **WORK PROGRAMME PLANNING**

The Committee received a suggested Work Programme Planning Document 2021/22. The Work Programme was a flexible working document that was subject to change as new issues arose. Members were encouraged to suggest items to be included in the Work Programme at any time.

The following items were on the Committee's Work Programme for 2021/22:

• New Towns Heritage Centre	This item would be included in the Programme for 2022/23.
• Crime and Disorder	Because of the Covid19 disruptions it had not been possible for partners to provide data. This was now due for a meeting in March 2022 .
• Neighbourhood and Wardens	Due for the next meeting on Tuesday 30 November 2021.
• Complaints/Your Say System	Date to be confirmed
• Damp and Mould	Due for the 3 rd quarter – Tuesday 30 November 2021. The Housing Investment Programme Manager to provide update.
• Cultural Strategy	Date to be confirmed.
• Housing Allocations Policy Review	Date to be confirmed.

Members suggested that there were many issues connected to social housing, and it was worth looking at the Housing and the tenancy agreements for social tenants. The Chair also suggested adding the Community Centres back on to the future Work Programme, and inviting someone from the Community Associations to provide feedback on Council/Community Centre working relationship.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Work Programme Planning Document 2021/22 be noted.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR