

# **Full Council Meeting – 15 December 2020**

## **Report of Councillor Benet Allen – Deputy Leader and Communications & Culture**

### **Communications**

The Communications Team continues to be busy supporting functions throughout the organisation with publicity requirements and keeping people informed about service provision, corporate initiatives and achievements.

Press releases have also been issued jointly with our colleagues in the district councils where we have been working together; and from the districts and the county council where appropriate.

Alongside Covid-19 messaging, we are now beginning to share Government messaging around the EU Transition.

Our Remembrance plans were stood down due to COVID-19 restrictions so commemorations were virtual this year with a variety of videos shared across our social media platforms. Our Civic Officer worked collaboratively with local veterans, Church representatives, military organisations and key civic dignitaries to create a virtual service. The social media content was well received.

Working towards Christmas, we are exploring the possibility of a virtual 'Carols around the Bandstand' service. This will keep momentum going for the successful concerts held over the last two years in aid of the Mayor's charities. Updates to follow as plans evolve.

We continue to share content from our partners, Public Health England and the Government across all our platforms.

Our platforms are also used to keep the public informed of services changes and provision across SWT and to support campaigns and initiatives.

Our social media officer created many videos for the virtual Remembrance event, and provided guidance, subtitles and images for those that were submitted.

The virtual Christmas lights switch-on is also being shared across social media along with a video made by our officer of the tree being transported and put in place. This has received a lot of engagement with a large number of shares and likes.

Social media banners are also being changed periodically to reflect our commemorations and events.

Our events officer has been working alongside the Environment Health Team and Public Health at Somerset County Council to ensure that any events could be managed safely.

As the first lockdown restrictions eased prior to the second lockdown there were three successful market events held in Castle Green, Taunton.

Channel Events organised the 'Moonlit Meadow Run' which successfully took place in French Weir Park in Taunton at the end of October. We worked with the organisers of this and the Minehead Triathlon which went ahead in line with Government advice and received some very positive feedback on how well organised it was.

Following the sharp increase in coronavirus cases, we have been continuing to work alongside Environmental Health and Public Health with organisations who had events planned for November and December. Many of these were unable to continue or are awaiting further information on easing of the latest restrictions in the hope that they can still take place.

The Christmas offer in Taunton is very different this year. The Christmas tree and lights have been installed by our Localities Team. The lights would usually be turned on as part of the annual Winterfest event but due to Covid restrictions this is not taking place this year. Instead, the Mayor of Taunton will be switching on the lights 'virtually' across our social media platforms.

Window dressing is also taking place in prime empty shop units in Taunton, Minehead and Wellington to help bring a festive feel to the towns; and production of a shop safely, shop locally advert to support our retail offer has been filmed, ready to air on Sky in early December.

Work continues on rolling out ShopAppy and encouraging businesses to sign up. ShopAppy is now present and operating in Minehead, Taunton and Wellington. Dulverton has now been added to the ShopAppy platform as well.

## **Culture**

The Cultural Forum reconvened at the end of October and was well attended by our partners and representatives across the culture and creative sectors. Despite the extremely challenging environment these sectors have faced throughout 2020, and still continue to face, there is a great deal of positivity and a commitment to work together to develop and implement an action plan that delivers on the emerging priority objectives in the council's draft Cultural Strategy (to be approved in the next few weeks).

SWT is pleased to be able to support cultural organisations and projects where possible, and is proud to have recently approve some grant funding, for example:

- Arts Taunton's TYCA Festival (Taunton Youth Culture Arts – which was a huge success this year despite the obvious challenges), and
- a consortium who are running a hybrid performance project presenting a new version of Cinderella to a socially distanced audience in six arts centres across Somerset, then broadcast this to a wider audience on social media via January's Theatre Nights (hosted by Somerset Film & the Brewhouse). This innovative project will create the opportunity for local audiences to experience the tradition of

Christmas pantomime within a C19 context – a great example of the cultural and creative sector providing a much needed festive boost!

A report from the Taunton Theatre Association, operator of the Brewhouse Theatre, is attached.