

Full Council Meeting – 30 March 2021

Report of Councillor Chris Booth - Community

What can I say? What a year...

This has been the most challenging year we've all ever been through and naturally so much we planned to support our communities faced extreme pressure as our staff were redirected and priorities changed.

However, we should be incredibly proud of what we've seen. In the initial stages of the lockdown the community really came together to help each out, mobilising to volunteer and assist where possible. This combined with the efforts of council officers to make sure the most vulnerable and needy were taken care of.

Words can't be expressed to thank those who did their parts to help (and still are!). The silver linings from this have been that we now have a much better idea of those in need, from adult social care to children needing ICT provision.

Of course, this meant that some of the projects in my portfolio have been put on the back burner for now, from the implementation of a PSPO for Taunton, to setting up a SWT Health and Wellbeing Board.

With this is going on, it's amazing that so much else has still happened, particularly at this council. Here are some highlights from my portfolio:

Community Resilience

The Community Resilience team undertook a wide range of work across the District including leading or supporting work on food resilience and community food larders, engagement with the voluntary and community sector; leading on S106 engagement with communities and coordinating One Team multi-agency working and complex case management. They managed several grant programmes, including the Somerset West Lottery scheme, voluntary and community grants. This included distributing £250k of Community Chest funding to small organisations and £23k to providers of food parcels.

The team have also progressed work to ensure the Council's approach is compliant and robust on a range of other work including community safety, safeguarding and domestic abuse. This included training to managers and front line staff on suicide awareness and prevention.

Community Chest

The Chest was rather an adapted part of our corporate agenda to provide more grant funding to SWT groups and organisations but in the end came in the form of Covid support given the pressing circumstances.

With a pot of £250K, we set a limit of £7,500 per applicant, ideally where this would fund a maximum of 75% of costs.

As of Friday 12th March 2021, we have given out nearly £240K to a whole range of organisations ranging from sea cadets to a heritage centre. The closing date was Monday 15th March as I submitted this report and so I will be able to provide final costs at Full Council. We plan to follow this up with some pictures and videos of successful applicants to put to the media.

I'd like to say a huge thank you to the 'Gang of Four', Scott, Pippa, Helen and Sam for being so diligent in their communications and research to ensure we are using taxpayer money appropriately.

Somerset West Lottery

- 86 local good causes currently registered
- 531 players (ticket buyers) buying 2 tkts each PW
- 7K cash prizes in last 12 months*
- *30K cash prizes since 2017
- There are also prizes of free tickets, plus bolt on prizes provided by Gatherwell, currently £1,000.00 in the spring bolt-on prize draw (01 March - 24 April)
- Over 230,000.00 tickets sold since 2017 raising £230,865.00 which after fees and service charges to Gambling Commission, Lotteries Council and Gatherwell (external management, platform etc) leaves a total revenue of £138,518.00.
- Local good cause income generated: £78,717.00 (net)
- Local Community Fund income generated: 53,821.00 (net) (**£59,801.00** less 10% SCF fees of £5,980.00)
- Annualised figures for local good causes currently: £20K
- Annualised figures for local community fund currently £10K

Social Value Strategy

We passed a strategy that sets out the Council's approach to embracing the Public Services(Social Value) Act 2012, recognising the potential that social value has in supporting the Council's overall aims and priorities and helping us to mitigate these challenges at no additional cost to the local taxpayer.

Social value is about using our influence and spending decisions to deliver additional economic, social and environmental benefit to the community.

This strategy primarily affects/enables Economic Development, Planning and Procurement functions of the Council. However, it is cross-cutting in relation to commissioning of services where it seeks to inspire a different approach; one which utilises the third sector in future delivery opportunities rather than SWT being the default delivery agent for emerging delivery requirements.

CCTV

We are proud that we resolved the inherited problem of CCTV provision being switched off in West Somerset last year and we are seeking to link this up within our contract with Sedgemoor to help monitor these locations.

On this matter, we are still seeking to create a better relationship with Sedgemoor going forward to ensure our coverage is given the due course it hasn't always been perceived to get. We are also still looking towards putting into place upgrading the cameras in Taunton Deane.

Voluntary and Community Grants

We are proud to continue to honour long-term support funding for many important organisations across SWT. We had hoped to spend some time leading up to this year reviewing our grants, many of which have been rolled over for years. Unfortunately, with Covid impacting our staff time and the impact on these organisations, we felt it was wrong to start a review which could potentially have a negative impact on an organisation in such precarious times. We are in the process of setting up a members panel to help scrutinise and more information on this will come very soon.