

Minutes

Partnership Development Group

5th February 2020



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
J Baugh	Yes	I Pritchard	Yes
G Courtauld	Yes	R Ramage (Vice-Chairman)	Apologies
Mrs M Cunningham (Chairman)	Yes	Mrs J Sandum	Apologies
T McArdle	Yes	P Thorogood	Yes
Mrs J Pell	Yes		

15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

INFORMATION: There were no interests declared.

16 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked, or statements made.

17 MINUTES

DECISION: The Minutes of the meeting of the Partnership Development Group held on 20th November 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

18 SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO LEISURE PROVISION ACROSS THE BRAINTREE DISTRICT – ACCESS TO SPORT – THIRD EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION

INFORMATION: The Chairman welcomed Councillor Ann Hooks, in her capacity as Chairman of Rayne Parish Council, to the meeting. Councillor Hooks was invited to attend the meeting in order to provide Members with an overview of leisure provision within the Rayne Parish area and to clarify who was responsible for the management of the different leisure facilities and amenities, what funding streams were available to help support and promote leisure provision (e.g. Mi Community BDC Grant), and the level of engagement from the public. It was explained that Rayne Village Hall was the main provider of leisure provision within the area, which included an outdoor gym, fitness trail, BMX track, playing fields, etc.

In addition to leisure provision, details were also provided of a 'Community and Leisure' survey that was distributed by Rayne Parish Council to local households in the summer of 2019. As part of the survey, questions were asked in regard to usage by residents of village facilities, such as the BMX track, and other amenities like that of the Booking Hall Café, children's play areas and allotments. It was reported that of the 1,300 dwellings in Rayne, a total of 147 responses were received which equated to an overall response rate

of approximately 10%. Another question was asked in relation to the facilities that local residents wanted to see in the village in future, for which there was a range of suggestions, such as a zip wire and splash park. Another question asked requested details of the different groups and societies that local householders belonged to; these included karate, fitness clubs, indoor bowls and the Rayne Riding Centre.

A copy of the full presentation slides was circulated to Members prior to the meeting. For reference, a copy of the presentation may also be viewed at the link below:-

https://www.braintree.gov.uk/membershub/downloads/download/36/overview_and_scrutiny_committee_agenda_and_reports

Further to the presentation, Members expressed their thanks to Councillor Hooks for the informative and useful presentation. In response to the questions that were subsequently raised by Members, Councillor Hooks provided the following information:-

- Members were informed that the initial installation of the BMX track in Rayne began in 2011/2012, with the official opening of the track having taken place in 2013.
- Councillor Hooks informed Members that as a Councillor, she was proud of the level of interest shown in Rayne and its facilities by residents outside of the village. This was especially so in the case of the children's playground, the facility of which was funded through lottery monies and indicative of the strong sense of community spirit that was present in Rayne. Facilities such as the Flitch Way, Booking Hall Café and local playing fields were popular attractions throughout the year; although local businesses often benefited from the stream of visitors, there could be issues experienced during the busier periods, such as a lack of parking spaces, although there were overflow sites available if this was needed.
- Members were informed that although infrequent, there had been instances of localised vandalism in Rayne. For example, in the summer 2019, it was publicised that vehicles were driven along the Flitch Way which caused damage to the route in some places. Concrete blocks were subsequently installed along sections of the route as a deterrent of this type of vandalism, although this had had an impact on the natural aesthetic of the area.
- The playing fields in Rayne were maintained entirely by the local cricket and football clubs, whereas the nature reserve and hedges were maintained by the Parish Council. The Village Hall Committee was responsible for the local playground; however, there were some areas of maintenance overseen by the Parish Council as well (e.g. management of weeds by groundsmen). It was acknowledged that there was a degree of crossover as to which organisations were responsible for the maintenance of which areas, but it was added that written agreements were in place that stipulated the different areas of responsibility clearly.
- In regard to breakdown or liability issues encountered with the outdoor gym equipment, Members were advised that such instances did not occur often. Any issues experienced were normally related to general maintenance (i.e. wearing of paint over time). It was reported that the Village Hall Committee carried out regular inspections of the equipment to ensure it was all in sufficient working order, whilst local residents were normally quick to report any issues.

- There were two contributing factors which helped to ensure the success of Rayne's vast quantity of leisure facilities activities; the enthusiasm and dedication of local people (e.g. Village Hall Committee members) and having sustainable financial support. For example, the members of the Village Hall Committee were known to work effectively together, which in turn helped to encourage other residents to get involved with their work. Having a sufficient financial resource available to support leisure provision was also instrumental in driving forward both existing and new schemes. The Village Hall Committee was self-maintained through its own fundraising and accounts, although it did liaise with the Parish Council on three separate financial precepts; the first was the sharing of defibrillator costs, the second was the payment of staff wages (e.g. wages for a cleaner to open and close public toilets in the summer holidays) and the third was the village fete.
- Members were informed that the leisure equipment in Rayne was not flood-lit; it was thought that this helped to prevent more cases of vandalism occurring in the evenings.
- A query was raised about the possibility of letting out playing field spaces in Rayne to other sports and leisure clubs for their use. It was advised that there was limited availability for letting out playing fields as they were often booked for use by the Cricket and Football Clubs.
- The 'Community and Leisure' survey that was sent to residents by Rayne Parish Council was done so in both electronic and paper format in order to give all residents the opportunity to provide their feedback if they so wished. The results of the survey were due to be made available for the public in the near future.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Hooks again for her presentation and for the responses provided to Members, adding that she was welcome to remain for remaining duration of the meeting if she so wished. Councillor Hooks elected to stay for the remainder of the meeting.

The Chairman then invited the Governance and Members Officer to introduce the second half of the evidence gathering session, "Scrutiny Enquiry with Parish Clerks – Leisure Provision and Access to Sports – Responses." As per the report, Members were provided with a brief summary of the recent scrutiny enquiry which had taken place between Braintree District Council and Parish and Town Clerks. The enquiry commenced on 7th January 2020 and ended on 24th January 2020; however, responses received after this date were accepted as well. The enquiry sought to establish what level of leisure and sports provision there was in place across the District in Town and Parish Council areas, what the available resources were and how accessible those facilities were for local residents.

In considering the scrutiny enquiry responses from Parish and Town Clerks, Members made the following comments:

- The responses received were generally positive as they indicated that Parish Councils were engaged with leisure provision and committed to managing the available funds and facilities that they had. As well as the importance of financial resources, the importance of volunteers and the willingness of people to be involved with the provision of leisure and sport in their own areas was also stressed. Members agreed that it would be useful for them to understand what sport and leisure facilities in Parish areas were still in frequent use and fulfilled local resident needs, which of those were perhaps expendable due to a lack of use, and whether there was a higher or lower

uptake of such facilities in the rural areas of the District when compared with that of urban.

- Although they provided Members with a useful insight into leisure provision across the District, it was highlighted that Parish Clerks were not necessarily aware of all types of leisure activities that took place in their areas; for example, in Halstead, there was a Cricket Club, Rounders Team in the summer, an active Boxing Club and a skate BMX park, the park of which was due to be replaced through the use of Section 106 funds. It was added that CCTV had been installed at the Sports Ground as well, due to problems experienced in the area.
- The Chairman made reference to comments received in response to the scrutiny enquiry from Councillor Mrs Parker. Councillor Mrs Parker mentioned a survey that was sent out to all Wards across the District by officers in the Community Services Team. The survey requested details of the different activities and facilities that were available in local areas, as this could help to combat the issue of social isolation and loneliness. It was surmised that the data collected could be utilised by the Members of the Partnership Development Group to help it build a more comprehensive list of what was available for residents in terms of leisure provision throughout the District than that which Parish Clerks alone could provide.
- As a point of interest, Members were informed that the Village Hall at Rayne had CCTV equipment installed as a deterrent to vandalism.
- Rayne was considered to be a primary example of how leisure provision could flourish in rural areas as a result of a few key principles; namely, these principles included a sustainable financial resource, a village central hub, effective communication and media tools, and positive engagement and enthusiasm from local residents.
- A suggestion from a Member to help incentivise partnerships across the District was to encourage the use of grants (e.g. toward facilities such as changing rooms).
- The Essex Community Foundation was mentioned as an example of a trust which supported local voluntary and community organisations by investing and distributing funds on behalf of a wide range of donors. The Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) and the Essex Rural Fund (ERF) were others establishments which offered financial support to community groups and charities. Members' own Councillor Community Grants were also a potential funding stream that could be utilised to help support local communities.
- Councillor Hooks reminded Members that despite the successes experienced in Rayne in regard to leisure provision, there were still challenges be experienced as well. For example, it was highlighted that the cricket pavilion in Rayne was in need of repair and maintenance, and the changing rooms used for the football club at the back of the village hall were in need of refurbishment.
- It was important for Members to give adequate consideration to what the public wanted in terms of leisure provision. Although community surveys like those implemented in Rayne were useful, the results would did necessarily capture the viewpoints of residents across different age groups. As such, the need for Members to incorporate a range of different viewpoints, rather than just from a few specific groups of people, was stressed.

- From the information received, it was inferred that there was a high percentage of land and buildings devoted to leisure activities in the more rural areas of the District; however, this did not appear to be the case in towns and other more urbanised areas, where there was much less land and buildings available for this purpose. This was often due to the expenses involved and areas of land that was intended for specific use only, such as for employment. A query was therefore raised as to what capacity the Committee had to comment in this issue during the development of the Local Plan as a means through which land use in the District might be addressed. Members subsequently agreed that this was an issue that prevented more leisure activities and facilities from being undertaken in urban areas. It was suggested that land use be included as a potential recommendation of the scrutiny review as a means of highlighting the issue further.
- Members were advised that the duration of the scrutiny review was fundamentally the decision of the Committee. Once finalised, the recommendations would then be presented to Full Council and Cabinet. In regard to other topics that were scheduled for scrutiny review by the Committee, it was advised that these could start to be examined alongside the current topic as well.
- Members were reminded that the issues in relation to land use was a prevalent one in villages and other smaller, rural areas as well, as use for agricultural land often took precedence over use for leisure facilities.

Further to the discussion by Members, the following actions were agreed:

- In respect of grant funding, Members were advised that there was a wide variety of funding streams available, and that the difficulty was with navigating through the various grants and identifying which was the most appropriate for which project. There were a number of officers within the Council who worked on grant support for different projects and small and medium-size businesses, although there was less certainty as to what support was available for smaller groups such as individual Parishes; officers in the Governance and Members Team subsequently agreed to undertake some research across the Council and feedback to Members at a later date.
- As part of the process for scrutiny reviews, Members were advised that surveys could be conducted in order to gather data from a range of sources. As there would be difficulty in undertaking a cross-District survey or public engagement exercise on a large scale, it was suggested that officers carried out research across the Council in order to ascertain what types of data colleagues had access to as a result of past consultation exercises and surveys with the public (e.g. such as the Maltings Lane facility consultation).
- Further to comments made by Members in respect of land use issues in towns, the Chairman suggested that a potential recommendation as part of the scrutiny review could be to examine planning policy around the change of use of land for industrial units, in order to allow for increased leisure provision in urban areas of the District.

The Chairman thanked Members for their discussion and the points of interest and actions that were raised. As a final note, Members were encouraged to view the annual Fusion presentation that was given at the meeting of Cabinet on 18th December 2019, if they had not already done so.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.25pm.

Councillor Mrs M Cunningham

(Chairman)