

Minutes

Community Development Scrutiny Committee

31st August 2022



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
Mrs C Dervish	Apologies	Mrs J Pell	Apologies
Mrs D Garrod (Chairman)	Yes	Miss M Weeks	Yes
A Hensman	No	Mrs S Wilson	Yes
Mrs A Kilmartin	Yes	B Wright	Yes
W Korsinah	Yes		

10 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: There were no Interests declared.

11 **MINUTES**

DECISION: The Minutes of the meeting of the Community Development Scrutiny Committee held on 10th August 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

12 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

13 **SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO MARKETS AND ASSOCIATED EVENTS WITHIN THE BRAINTREE DISTRICT – SECOND EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION**

INFORMATION: The Chairman was pleased to welcome a number of Council officers to the meeting who were in attendance in order to support Members' evidence gathering for the Scrutiny Review and provide a strategic overview of the District's markets. The officers included: Emma Goodings, Head of Planning and Economic Growth, Louise Raine, Economic Development Support Officer and Philip Taylor, Markets Superintendent. Olivia Washington, a local market trader ('Olivia's Curiosities') and NMTF (National Market Traders Federation) regional finalist, was also in attendance in order to share their experiences in the trade.

In order to assist Members, a presentation was provided by Emma Goodings and Louise Raine. The first section of the presentation gave Members some background as to the District's street markets, including the origin of the street market concept, the types of stalls that were available and the planning process behind such events (e.g. the Christmas Light Switch-On Event). For instance, it was reported that the concept of the monthly street markets first emerged in response to the need to rejuvenate the District's

town centres and attract a larger footfall, and runs alongside the traditional markets. Furthermore, it was noted that the latest shopping trends indicated that customers were now looking for a more 'unique experience' when shopping in order to access local suppliers and produce that the larger retail stores and online sites did not provide (e.g. homemade or craft goods, locally sourced goods, etc), or simply to access entertainment and social opportunities that could be shared with friends (e.g. through the consumption of food and drink).

The next section of the presentation provided responses to the questions listed within the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Scrutiny Review that the Committee was seeking to answer.

The first question was around the process for arranging markets and events over the last five-year period; in response, Members were advised that new applications for markets were received every week. In order to enable the team to assess each application effectively, the application form requested details such as the size of the pitch, what products they would be trading, whether they needed access to electrics or gas, public liability certificates, risk assessments, etc. For those traders who intended to provide food stalls, the team also requested that they contact the Environmental Health team or order to complete a food, health, and safety form (a five-star rating was required). The number of applications received over the last year was 100. When assessing applications, the team would normally try to ensure that there was minimal duplication of traders; however, in light of the Cost of Living Crisis, a more flexible approach was being taken (e.g. by placing similar stalls at different locations across the town centre). Other factors that were considered as part of the application and assessment stage was the traders' presence on social media, as a stronger online presence could help to advertise the town centre's facilities more widely, as well as suitable trading locations.

The Economic Development team worked closely with the Council's Operations Team in order to plan and monitor the market stalls, and also with George Yard Shopping Centre in Braintree, which provided further space for market stalls when needed. Traders were also provided with information packs and 'market maps' in advance of trading days which provided useful information such as arrival times, parking, location in the town centre, sequencing plan for arrival, etc. Traders were also encouraged to pre-pay for their pitches, if possible, rather than on the day. It was added that those who traded alcohol were also required to apply for a Temporary Event Notice (TEN) for the sale of alcohol from the Council's Licensing Team (10 clear working days in advance of the event). The Economic Development team also maintained a reserve list of traders if traders cancelled their pitch booking or wished to change locations. Feedback was also sought from traders following each event as to their experiences on the day, any issues that had arisen and what could be improved going forward.

The next question within the TOR was around the advertisement and promotion of markets and events, as well as the support that was offered during the Covid-19 pandemic and the uptake of this. In terms of identifying new traders, it was explained that officers within the Economic Development team adopted a proactive approach by attending other neighbouring market events and speaking to traders about the possibility of trading within the Braintree District. In order to help and support new traders within the town centres, there were a number of pop-up stalls available to hire and trial. In respect of publicity and marketing, there was a variety of physical branding used in the town centres such as a-boards and other means of signage that the Council had been able to purchase through Government funding. The street markets had separate branding from that of the regular markets which was used on the Council's website and social media channels, and

also printed onto posters for use on local noticeboards. Bloggers and Vloggers had attended past events such as the Christmas Lights Switch-On, which enabled those events to be promoted more widely via social media and YouTube.

During the pandemic, the street markets were required to stop as they were classed as non-essential retail, although regular food markets were allowed to continue trading. In May 2020, an online version of the street market was launched which could be accessed via the Council's social media feeds. Market traders were required to apply and be approved before they could participate in the online market platform, which provided an alternative avenue in which they could continue with their stalls and potentially attract new groups of customers during the pandemic. Over the Christmas period in 2020, the Council supported the 'shop local' and 'small business Saturday' campaigns. During the pandemic year, traders were also offered free listings on the 'Visit Braintree District' website, as well as digital assets that they could utilise themselves (e.g. social media channels). It was reported that some of the traders also engaged with the 'Click It Local' online sales and delivery platform, which was funded by the Council and again provided traders with an alternative means of reaching customers and selling their products. It was added that the platform had since ceased operation.

Following the pandemic, the physical markets were re-started in July 2021. Unfortunately, some of the historic market traders had ceased with their businesses due to the impacts of the pandemic; as such, it had taken a prolonged period to rejuvenate the markets and encourage residents back into the town centres.

In respect of the partners and outside bodies that the Council worked with in order to manage and advertise markets and events, the organisation had examined the age demographic of the town's market traders and given consideration as to how it might encourage younger traders to trade within the area. For example, the possibility of hosting a 'Young Traders Market' was explored; local colleges had been contacted around this as well, and the Council also had a separate 'Young Entrepreneurs' programme. Ultimately, there was not enough interest generated from the 18–30-year-old age bracket to make the Young Traders Market a reality. As a result, younger traders were accommodated within the regular markets and street events.

In terms of the impacts of the markets on local areas and communities, Members were advised that one of the fundamental aims of the street markets concept was to engender a sense of community back into Braintree town centre and the wider District, and it was felt that the street markets had been successful in this regard. Regarding transport provision, this remained unchanged on the market days; in the past, buses had been able to access the main high street, but following the pedestrianisation of the town centre, the bus routes remained unchanged on market days. Cycle parking was available at different points across the town centre, and there were also several large car parks that both traders and customers could use both in the town centre and outskirts.

In response to a number of points that were raised at the last meeting of the Committee, the following information was also provided:

- Regarding measuring footfall, Members were advised that this was usually undertaken on a more general basis by Market officers during market days. It was added that the Council had previously employed 'footfall counters' via a third-party company in order to monitor this. The cost to the Council of this was approximately £10,000 per year. The contract for this work ended during the pandemic and was not renewed; in part, this was due to the high costs associated with the work, but also because of the lack of

accuracy of the instruments used by the counters. However, it was added that one of the Council's business tenants was currently developing a piece of software that measured footfall, and it was hoped that the Council could work with them in future in to trial this technology.

- Members were informed that the concept of the street markets was trialed in Witham in 2019, following the successful rollout of the events in Braintree. Existing traders were invited to attend. From this exercise, officers determined that there was a disparity in the demographic and set of businesses in Witham town centre when compared with that of Braintree's; for example, some of the food traders did not experience as many sales in Witham as they had done in Braintree, perhaps because there were a wider variety of food shops already in place in the area. There were also difficulties in relation to the physical environment in Witham; for example, there was a lack of pavement space in some areas, which meant that market stalls could block entrances to local shops, and in areas where there was open space, the footfall was not necessarily as large. Furthermore, as this part of the town centre in Witham was privately owned, the Council was more constrained regarding the number of traders it could make arrangements for (similarly to George Yard Shopping Centre in Braintree).
- The expectation of the Council was that market traders within the town centre would provide their own market stalls, of which there was a range of sizes and types, particularly in respect of the street markets where some traders used converted vehicles. It was also felt that the different shapes and sizes of market stalls added to the character of the street markets. It was added that although branding could be used for the street markets, this would come at a cost to the Authority in terms of capital and ongoing resources.
- In respect of potential farmers' markets, Members were reminded that the street markets were already open to food and drink stalls. With the Government funding which was secured during Covid, a one-off food and drink market was able to be held in February 2022 which was well received, although the stalls were not specifically linked to local farmer produce. The Council has continued to investigate the opportunities for a farmer's market, such as through contact with Essex Young Farmers; however, it had been difficult for officers to obtain feedback.

The full presentation may be viewed on the Council's YouTube Channel via the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPlpabDW56k>

The Chairman then thanked the officers for their presentation and invited Members to ask their questions. In response to the questions that were raised, the following information was provided:-

- Members were advised that the presence of markets was very dependent on weather conditions. For instance, there tended to be a pause in terms of the street markets in January and February time, owing to the anticipated poorer weather conditions; however, due to the Christmas period, November and December months tended to be busiest in terms of market uptake and visitor footfall.
- Members were advised that within the Terms and Conditions for market traders in the District, it stated that traders were "not allowed" to park their vehicles on the markets unless "essential" for their market stall. There were ongoing discussions with individual traders as to the appropriateness of different vehicles around this, but it was underlined that there plenty of nearby parking available across the town centres.

- There were no regular 'health' or 'livewell' market stalls in the District, although local gyms did occasionally participate in pop-up markets (e.g. Bannatyne) in order to advertise their facilities, along with organisations such as Fusion Lifestyle.
- Areas such as Newland Street in Witham were managed by Essex County Council and difficult to close during market events due to their designation as main roads through the town.
- In respect of the number of regular market traders that had applied since July 2021, Members were advised that on the application form, new traders had the option to choose which dates they wanted to apply for. It was added that the Council did not currently offer any discount schemes to regular market traders within the District.
- The usually allowed regular market traders to operate from the same location in the town; the only exception to this was on occasions where a trader was absent (e.g. due to ill health or holiday) and there as such were spaces available for new traders.
- It was confirmed that the Council no longer employed a third-party company to undertake monitoring of the town's footfall. It was highlighted that the company still provided some more general data regarding the District, with no cost to the Authority.
- Members were advised that as part of best practice, the Council did explore markets outside of the Braintree District to see what they offered and whether there were any useful ideas that could be taken forward.
- Following the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council utilised the Government's 'Welcome Back' funding scheme. As this funding was due to expire in March 2022, the Council elected to trial a food and drinks market which took place during the February half-term. It was reported that the feedback received from this event had been positive and that the Council would give consideration to holding similar events in future. However, it was underlined that such events required the use of a huge number of extra resources, both in terms of staffing and costings. The street markets were held primarily to generate income and footfall for local businesses, and any extra facilities provided in addition to the market stalls to help increase the footfall during such events (e.g. such as entertainment) would be at an extra cost to the Authority. There were also further resource implications in respect of the clear-up operation following an event.
- There was usually a wider variety of traders interested in taking part in the street markets during seasonal times of year, such as December, when there was a tendency by shopper to spend more.

At the end of Members' questions, Olivia Washington was invited to introduce themselves to the Committee and share their experiences as a young trader. Olivia's business was focused on fabric, haberdashery and alternative décor and first began in 2018. After taking part in the Braintree textile fayre at the town hall in 2019, Olivia began trading in the Braintree Street Market as a 'pop up' trader. Olivia had previously taken part in the Witham markets, but found they had more success in terms of business in Braintree. Alongside Braintree, Olivia also traded in Bury St Edmunds on a once-a-month basis, which was a much larger market that saw approximately 70 traders take part.

Members then asked Olivia a number of questions. In response, the following information was provided:-

- The materials that were used as part of Olivia's haberdashery work were sourced from a number of locations, which included London and occasionally Birmingham. However, many of the supplies used were ordered online and posted to Olivia directly.
- Olivia also made a number of handmade products, which included paperweights and fabrics in the shape of skulls. In addition to being sold at the street markets, some of Olivia's products were on display at the Blast! Music store at the far end of the High Street in Braintree.
- In respect of the NMTF Young Trader competition, Members were advised that there was an application process which identified potential candidates. The applicants selected were then required to take part in local heats, for which there were four separate judging categories; these were: general retail, arts and crafts, food and drink and all groceries. Successful candidates were then put forward as finalists.
- Regarding the NMTF competition, Olivia explained that although stressful in terms of business uptake, the experience had been largely positive and rewarding as it had enabled them to meet and get to know a much wider group of people through the market network.

A number of questions were then raised with officers in the Economic Growth team. In response, the following information was provided and actions agreed:-

- Market traders were sent an e-mail in advance of their trading day (usually on the Friday or Monday before the day) which included a map of the area that showed where individual traders would be located, as well a general 'courtesy' document which detailed arrival and leaving times and the protocol for setting up whilst working alongside other traders. A sequencing plan was also included within the e-mail to help ensure that the arrival times of market traders were staggered, which assisted market supervisors with managing the set-up of various, multiple traders. Such plans were particularly important during events such as the Christmas Lights Switch-On in Braintree, which involved even larger numbers of traders, stalls, and stages. For the benefit of Members, officers agreed to circulate an example of this e-mail to the Committee.
- In respect of the Christmas Lights Switch-On event, Members were advised that the Council usually worked with St John's Ambulance to help ensure there were services on site in the case of an emergency. For other, smaller- scale events, officers in the Council's Operations team tended to monitor the activities in the town and notify the appropriate authorities should an incident or emergency occur.
- In terms of the costs of holding large-scale events, the lights during the Switch-On event were hugely expensive, along with the staging. Although it was sourced locally, the Christmas tree used was also costly. After this, the entertainment supplied on the day could also be quite expensive. It was highlighted that the income generated from such events was primarily for the market traders, although the increased footfall was of benefit to the town shops as well.
- The budget for the upcoming Christmas Lights Switch-On event was approximately £20 - 25,000, which included the lighting as well. It was agreed that any costings or

data that the team had available regarding such events, particularly the Switch-On event, would be circulated to the Committee following the meeting.

- In respect of the software used to monitor footfall, officers were unsure of the exact timings of this. Emma Goodings agreed to speak with the Council's IT team to see if any details could be circulated to Members in relation to this.
- In terms of footfall in the town centre on Street Market days, local shops in the town generally found that the larger footfall helped to increase the rate of trade within their own businesses. This was of great importance immediately following the pandemic, where the footfall from the Street Markets was needed to help businesses recover their losses. However, it was highlighted that increased footfall in the town centre did not necessarily guarantee lead to greater income for all traders and businesses.; rather, this was dependent on the time of year (e.g. Summer vs. seasonal shopping trends in the Winter).

At the end of the evidence gathering session, the Chairman expressed her grateful thanks to the officers and Olivia for the presentation and their contributions to the meeting.

Members were then encouraged to send any recommendations they had (e.g. as to future witnesses who could be invited to attend future meetings, the draft scrutiny report, etc) to the Chairman and Governance Officers.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.32pm.

Councillor Mrs D Garrod
(Chairman)