

DECISION NOTICE - CORONAVIRUS EMERGENCY RELATED

Key Executive Decision taken by an OFFICER

KEY DECISION

Immediate Closure of the Play Service, Community Centres and Stevenage Museum **DECISION TAKER:**

Name: Richard Protheroe

Job Title: Strategic Director

Signature:

Date: January 2021

REASON WHY THIS DECISION DID NOT APPEAR ON THE FORWARD PLAN AND THE URGENCY PROVISIONS WERE NOT FOLLOWED:

This key decision/decision outside the Council's Budget and Policy Framework was taken as part of the Council's emergency response to the national Coronavirus Emergency. Due to the necessary speed of decision taking at this time it was not possible to comply with the Council's Constitution that includes the requirement to give 28 days' notice of the decision to be taken; publish details 5 clear days before the decision was taken; publish the decision within 2 days of it being taken; and provide the 5 day call-in period before implementation. Nor was it possible to comply with the Urgency provisions in the Constitution

Following the announcement of the national Covid-19 lockdown on 5th January an urgent decision was made not to re-open the council's Culture, Wellbeing and Leisure offer, specifically the Play Service and Stevenage Museum and Community Centres. The urgency with which the lockdown measures were introduced, announced on 4 January, meant that the requirement to close services with immediate effect could not be planned.

DECISION TAKEN:

The announcement of the national lockdown from 5th January required a range of public venues to close with immediate effect. This including cultural institutions such as Museums and Theatres and youth clubs and community venues not providing essential childcare. Under these definitions the Stevenage Museum and Play Centres associated with the Play Service and Community Centres are included in the restrictions and should remain closed for the period of the lockdown. The exception being those Community Centres providing essential childcare. This decision will remain under review as further

government announcements relating to the restrictions are made. The government has not yet determined an end date for the restrictions, although these are anticipated to continue throughout February. Any easing of restrictions are unlikely to allow sites to be fully operational ahead of roll-out of the Covid-19 vaccine to all vulnerable groups. It is anticipated that this will not occur before the end of March 2021. If it does then this decision will be reviewed ahead of then. Staff from these services will be offered redeployment opportunities across the council to support other efforts during the pandemic.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

The decision has been made in accordance with the national lockdown restrictions announced on 4 January in the interest of public safety.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED:

The lockdown measures became law as national restrictions on 6th January, therefore officers were unable to consider alternative options.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The closure of the Play Service and the Museum has a financial implication in staffing costs and ongoing building maintenance costs for all related buildings including Community Centres, which cannot be recouped. Community Associations operating the council's Community Centres are applying for further government support in relation to their business disruption.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

The closure of these services comes under the emergency provisions of the Coronavirus Act 2020.

The measures are a response to the government guidance on the Covid-19 pandemic and within the Council's gift to make.

Play Centres were closed following government advice in relation to the closure of schools and similar facilities.

Following government advice for identified people within the community to self-isolate plus the consequential impact upon those members of the community who are vulnerable or who need help and support SBC devised the establishment of a Community Response Team for Stevenage to ensure immediate support could be provided. (General Powers of Competence – Localism Act 2011)

The Community Centres were closed following advice from government with regard to public facilities hosting gatherings for members of the community the only exception to this that applied to Stevenage Community Centres that provided child care for key workers.

There are no legal implications as a result of the proposed changes and these are in line with the latest government guidelines regarding social distancing and limiting works within properties to those which are deemed essential)

EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS:

The closure of all of these services will have impact all parts of the community who currently use the services. Stevenage Helps has increased its capacity to support those in immediate hardship or those who need support and advice. The closure of the services will assist in the protection of older people and those vulnerable to the Covid-19 virus.

CONSULTATIONS:

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Leisure and Culture and Neighbourhoods & Co-operative Council have been consulted as have members of the Coronavirus Executive Committee at their meeting of 8th January. Members supported the measures in relation to the national lockdown guidance.

Relevant staff and partner organisations have also been informed.

Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

I agree that this decision was reasonable in all the circumstances, was urgent and could not reasonably be deferred.

I further agree that any delay likely to be caused by the call -in process would prejudice the Council's or the public interest and that the decision should not therefore be subject to call-in.

Signed:

Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date:

DATE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISION:

5 January 2021