

REPORT OF THE HEALTHY ROTHER WORKING GROUP

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A INTRODUCTION

At an Alliance Group meeting, a decision was taken to explore the possibility of including in the Corporate Plan the topic of the promotion of good mental and physical health within Rother.

Having worked on this subject, the Working Group strongly believe that 'Healthy Rother' should be an important heading within the Corporate Plan. We believe this because the heading includes areas which are not properly covered elsewhere, and we believe that the promotion of good mental and physical health is central to the work of District Councils.

Any worthwhile policy of Rother District Council should tend to contribute to good mental and physical health while, conversely, any policy aimed at enhancing health should have benefits of another kind. For example, healthy housing is good housing.

The District Councils' Network Argument for the place of Health Promotion in the Agenda of District Councils

The District Councils Network has succinctly summed up the reasons why District Councils' work is intimately connected with physical and mental health outcomes.

It states that 'District Councils make a major but often under-recognised contribution to the health of citizens and communities. As English devolution and the move towards integrated place-based public services gathers pace, they will be critical partners of the NHS and other tiers of local government programmes.'

The full case for the role of District Councils in relation to public health has been included in Appendix 1.

In order to develop Key Performance indicators, it would be helpful to act on the King's Fund recommendation that District Councils carry out more Health Impact Assessments (HIAs)

The district councils network believe that councils can play a key role in supporting the flourishing of individuals and communities in five key areas. They are strategic leadership, services and commissioning, strengthening communities, organisational level activity, and measuring wellbeing outcomes.

B THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

There are key pieces of legislation which give District Councils the powers they need in order to act in these areas

These include:

1 The Local Government Act 2000, which empowers local authorities to promote the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of an area and the new power of general competence.

2 Legislative changes set out in the Local Government Act and the Public Capital Act 2007 and the Duty to Involve 2009 which enabled local authorities to devolve power to local communities. The proposed new responsibilities for local government in public health, as set out in the Health White Paper 2010, are also relevant. Local area partnership working can help ensure that a wellbeing lens is applied both to a council's policies and services and to the work of its partner organisations and agencies. A wellbeing approach might be built into new ways of conceiving, designing and delivering services.

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C. THE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The Committee set about the task of mapping the field, and, by considering what approaches had been followed in various District Councils, identified ten Strategic Objectives. We have suggested Key Performance Indicators which could be used to measure progress in each of them.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1- TO SUPPORT THE PEOPLE OF ROTHER IN THE CHALLENGES THEY FACE THROUGHOUT THEIR LIFE CYCLES

A number of District Councils have decided to focus on experiences shared by significant numbers of their residents at key stages and events in their lifetimes. There are certain transitions and events in people's lives that generate particular challenges and stresses, and it is at such times that various forms of support from within the community can be invaluable.

We identified two particular stages in life trajectories at which District Councils have offered support. This first was young mothers and families. This can include all types of family, whether conforming to traditional configurations or not. Young mothers can often feel isolated, and find their capacity to cope can be severely tested. District Councils can provide befriending, support and advice services to assist at this often challenging time.

District Councils can intervene to support families and individuals across the entire life span, from infancy to old age.

It is not always realised how cost effective intelligently targeted intervention can be. For example, it has been discovered that 77% of older people who move into residential accommodation do so 'because they cannot manage their gardens.' Support with gardening, not only leads to people being more willing to go outside and enjoy their gardens, enabling people to remain in their own homes. We believe that such support could be delivered

through partnership with community organisations like Bexhill in Bloom and Bexhill Neighbourhood gardeners.

We believe that looking at the issues raised by a consideration of the issues faced by particular groups will help to shape the kinds of intervention which can result in constructive change. As an example of this, we looked at the needs of older people in a little more detail.

Older people,

These include: being enabled to be social and active; being stimulated and energised; gaining knowledge and maintaining brain health; maintaining mobility and balance; being able to live a life of enjoyment and fun. Some may need to have access to dementia-friendly activities. Many would benefit from gaining knowledge about ageing well. Activities like dancing could be helpful. Community buses to take people to centres like the De La Warr for entertainment, or to community halls, would have the benefits of reducing loneliness and could help with emotional and mental health issues.

Cllr Timpe is working with Active Rother on an event around the subject of ageing well on September 14th.

Potential KPIs.

1 Figures for people accessing gardening assistance

2. Figures for membership of social clubs and societies

3. Clear evidence of growing provision of community buses to take people from the villages to events with a social character

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: TO ENABLE THE PEOPLE OF ROTHER TO REACH THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH OPEN TO THEM THROUGH HEALTH EDUCATION

Health Education.

An inexpensive way to achieve this might be to appoint a Councillor reporting to the Cabinet, as a Health Champion. We envisage this post-holder establishing a network of Health Champions throughout the District.

We have already made a small move in the direction of achieving this by setting up the 'Healthy Rother' Facebook Group. It is attracting steadily increasing membership and there is already some posting by groups and individuals.

The principle behind it, and of a concentration on this area, is to bring knowledge related to health together, and to disseminate it in order to build a community which is health conscious in effective ways. Topics include: anti-smoking, eating healthily, how to cope with depression and anxiety; what to do if you are feeling suicidal or are self-harming; difficulties faced by young people; pregnancy; breast cancer awareness; prostate trouble-the warning signs; avoiding diabetes and how best to manage it; how to avoid heart attack and stroke; attaining and maintaining a healthy weight; exercises to maintain mobility and flexibility; how to become a runner (couch to 5k-BBC); learning to swim; water safety.

By disseminating knowledge, it should be possible to build a community which is health conscious in effective ways. People also need to know how to recognise when they need help and how to access it. An inexpensive way to continue this kind of work in the immediate future might be the Council to appoint a Councillor as a Health Champion.

Potential KPIs.

- 1) **The appointment of a Health Champion.**
- 2) **The Health Champion to produce figures on the impact of their work**
- 3) **Membership and usage figures for Healthy Rother**

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3: TO ENSURE HOUSING POLICY PROMOTES THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING OF INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES

Housing

Housing is essential to health, and this raises issues squarely in the competencies of District Authorities. Insulating homes properly is one of the most effective ways of improving health, and counteracting poverty caused by excessive fuel bills. We wondered what progress is being made with this and whether it was something with which Alliance Homes should be or could be involved. We wondered how enforcement was going where tenants had unsatisfactory housing, noting that it was often poor landlords who failed to ensure proper insulation for rented property. We also wondered whether the RDC employed or could employ a handy person to help people who needed someone trustworthy to carry out minor repairs and home adaptations, similar to the service around providing facilities of this kind at Wealden DC.

We are also concerned that the Council ensures that grants are available to make homes more accessible. There is some evidence that take-up of these grants runs at a very low level, which suggests that further promotion would be invaluable.

We have learned that a new government grant has been created to help Councils finance this kind of work.

Potential KPIs

- 1) **Produce figures for number of homes with retro-fitted insulation in Rother**
- 2) **Figures for the number of people accessing a handyperson service, and levels of satisfaction with the service**

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4: TO CREATE AND SUSTAIN LEISURE SERVICES WHICH ATTRACT PEOPLE TO LIVE IN THE DISTRICT AND PROVIDE ALL RESIDENTS WITH VARIED ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING

Leisure Facilities.

Rother District Council is committed to bringing all Bexhill leisure facilities, currently provided by Freedom Leisure, onto one site on Downs Road but believes that it is prudent to wait until we understand the emerging patterns of demand for leisure facilities before committing substantial capital investment on new buildings. We propose to conduct a comprehensive community consultation in early 2022 to assess how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected expectations and demands for leisure facilities like indoor sports, swimming and keep fit facilities. We will also look at what innovations are now required to achieve our new Healthy Rother objectives. The consultation results will feed into the work to review existing facilities in Rye as well as the work to redevelop the existing Bexhill Leisure Centre and pool at Glyne Gap and of other facilities across the district.

Swimming

As a group, we support the idea of providing good swimming facilities. We wondered whether we had, or could negotiate, an arrangement which Wealden has with Freedom Leisure whereby swimming can be prescribed under a Social Prescribing scheme. (See below)

Running

PARK RUN- Cllr Gray investigated the idea of initiating with a start-up cost of £4000, which includes the provision of a defibrillator. It is a PARK RUN requirement to undertake running it on a weekly basis. It is hoped that an existing organisation, like Bexhill Runners, would be interested in taking on the organisation, and that Rother would help with the £4000 start-up costs. We support the idea in principle.

Potential KPIs.

- 1) Number of people taking part in the Park Runs**
- 2) Statistics from Freedom Leisure about usage, including a breakdown of the figures showing some categories of user.**
- 3) Relate the results of the Leisure Survey to the pattern of Leisure Services provided**

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5: TO PROMOTE ACTIVE TRAVEL IN THE INTERESTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

Active Travel.

Walking.

We plan to organise a Walking Festival and suggest it could be run from August 16th to August 22nd. We thought there was a lot of scope for organisations to run even more walks than they do now. Suggested organisations include the Ramblers throughout Rother, Walking for Health groups, the Bexhill Museum Association and Bexhill Heritage. We would like to see all the footpaths in Rother properly mapped so their continued existence could be guaranteed for

generations. We thought more use could be made of the Combe Valley Country Park and the Pevensey Levels.

Cycling.

The Council can encourage cycling in a number of ways. It can promote, especially amongst its contractors and partners, the 'Cycle to Work' scheme. It can work with the County Council on the positioning of bike parks. It can endorse government policies over the reallocation of space, policies which fit well with the Council's Environment Policies, and which can also play a part in the Regeneration agenda. It can find ways to introduce the subject of cargo bikes, especially electric ones, which can provide non-polluting delivery services, particularly relevant in an era of increased internet shopping. It can endorse the idea of cycling infrastructure investment, working in conjunction with the County Council on schemes that improve connectivity using physically segregated cycleways. This would benefit both cyclists and other road users. RDC can liaise with schools to encourage cycling and cycling training and can support separate facilities for cyclists in its larger green spaces.

We have been very impressed by the Pump track in Battle and believe that schemes of this kind could be promoted throughout the District.

Potential KPIs

- 1) **Statistics on the Cycle to Work Scheme e.g. number of participating firms and individuals**
- 2) **Statistics on the number and type of bikes bought at private bike vendors in Rother**
- 3) **Numbers of students travelling to school or college by bike**
- 4) **Number of participants in cycling training**

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6: TO ADD TO AND ENHANCE THE GREEN SPACES OF ROTHER IN TERMS OF AESTHETICS, ECOLOGY, BIODIVERSITY, PLEASURE AND UTILISATION

Green spaces.

Green spaces provide many benefits to communities, including recreational value, both informal (e.g. dog walking) or formal (e.g., organised sports); wildlife habitats; climate change mitigation and adaptation (e.g. sustainable drainage features; wild flower meadows; aesthetic value; local character and distinctiveness; supporting healthy lifestyle (opportunities for physical activity outdoors) and mental wellbeing (providing access to nature); community cohesion and possibly food growing. Our urban green spaces in Rother include parks and gardens, playing fields and sports pitches, footpaths bridleways and cycle routes; Village greens; informal green spaces; cemeteries and church yards; allotments and community gardens and roadside verges. By focusing on urban green spaces, we can provide the greatest benefit for people and biodiversity. Making our green spaces more attractive will

encourage people to relax and spend more time outdoors, helping local communities to socialise and contribute to healthy living.

We favour the appointment of Tree Wardens. We would like the Council to implement 'No Mow May' and urge ESCC to create as many wildflower verges as possible.

We support the ideas of a creation of a 'Rother Forest' and the 'Doubling Nature' ideas .

Potential KPIs

- 1) **Number of new trees planted in Rother and by whom as against number of trees lost**
- 2) **Growth in acreage of Green Spaces**
- 3) **Increased applications for allotments**
- 4) **Growth in community food marketing**

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 7: TO MAKE AVAILABLE AND TO FURTHER NON-MEDICAL WAYS OF IMPROVING MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH THROUGH ACTIVITY, INVOLVEMENT AND SOCIALISATION.

Social Prescribing

This facility can reduce the strain on existing services while providing more swift access to effective ways of improving health. Some Districts have opened non-medical social prescribing centres in conjunction with community connectors which have encouraged people to cycle or walk more, to develop their social relationships and take up hobbies like gardening. This can help people to reduce their reliance upon both prescription drugs and various forms of addiction.

Potential KPIs

- 1) Number of people referred to a social prescribing service and follow-up statistics on the outcome of the referrals**
- 2) Statistics from the NHS on Social Prescribing.**

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 8: TO SPREAD A SENSE OF BELONGING, OWNERSHIP AND COMMUNITY ON ALL APPROPRIATE LEVELS.

Creating and Enhancing Community.

A sense of belonging has been shown to have a very significant effect upon health outcomes. This issue will be explored further in subsequent versions of this document.

'Five Ways to Wellbeing' (New Economic Foundation (NEF), 2008) is a well-known evidence-based approach to creating wellbeing in individuals and communities.

Five Ways to Wellbeing

- *ONE. Connect – Connect to the people around you: with family, friends, colleagues and neighbours, in home, work, school and in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building on these connections will support and enrich you every day.*
- *TWO. Be Active – Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly discover a physical activity you enjoy and one that suits your level of mobility and fitness.*
- *THREE. Take notice – Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are walking to work, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.*

- *FOUR. Keep Learning – Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a new responsibility at work, Fix a bike. Learn how to play a favourite instrument or cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.*
- *FIVE. Give – do something nice for a friend or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and create connections with the people around you. (NEF, 2008)*

Potential KPIs

1 Number of people accessing courses throughout Rother. Particular institutions could be a focus e.g. the De La Warr, parish halls, University of the Third Age, Bexhill Museum, the WEA and Children’s Centres; membership of bowling, football and tennis clubs; clubs like RAFA.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 9: TO ENABLE THOSE WITH SPECIFIC CHALLENGES TO LIVE THEIR LIVES IN FULL AND SATISFYING WAYS

Helping those with specific challenges.

This may include sight, hearing or movement difficulties. There are already national societies with local branches throughout Rother such as the Royal National Institute for the Blind which works with the N.H.S. to provide support services, group meetings and practical aids. Bexhill Homecare and MENCAP are examples of other voluntary organisations which provide relevant assistance. We propose to raise awareness of what is available with an opportunity for the local authority to work with voluntary organisations and the Clinical Commissioning Group to facilitate co-ordination, publicity and to create specific projects like the Seaford Beach Access project.

Potential KPIs

- 1) **Membership of specific organisations like the RNIB, Scope, Mind**
- 2) **Number of people reached and helped by specific organisations like Mencap, Rother Voluntary Action etc**

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 10: TO WORK TOWARDS THE ELIMINATION OF HEALTH INEQUALITIES WITHIN ROTHER

Health Inequalities have been highlighted during the Pandemic, it becoming clear that the poorer regions of the country have suffered both the highest rate of infections and deaths, as well as being the areas where there has been the lowest uptake of vaccines; higher mortality has also been noticed amongst ethnic minority communities, due, at least in part, to the predominance of customer-facing jobs requiring physical presence as against those which could be switched online. In ordinary times, life expectancy is very affected by wealth; the

inhabitants of Chelsea, despite its high pollution levels, enjoy one of the most extended life expectancies, while Middlesbrough has one of the lowest. Poverty is correlated with unhealthy life styles and high stress levels. In tackling the causes of health inequality, a Council is inevitably tackling wider issues of inequality in the country. This is an area where intervention can be cost-effective, as health inequalities are a drain upon health services of all kinds. What has been done by Essex is cited by the District Councils Network as an example relevant at District Level, and its example has been included in an appendix.

Many families who live in poverty can be helped with their food budgets by having opportunities to learn more about cooking from scratch and economical shopping. Food banks and Children's Centres offer courses for families while the Mothers' Union produce booklets for university students with recipes and hints for eating well on a budget. District Councils can publicise such ventures and can also provide them in, for example, community halls.

Here in Rother, there may be opportunities to follow the lead of District Councils which have negotiated contracts with providers to enable more disadvantaged citizens to enjoy leisure or cultural facilities free of charge. Subsidised travel can be offered to poorer people from outlying areas to centrally situated entertainment venues like the De La Warr or to parish halls where forms of entertainment (e.g. pantomimes, amateur drama, music performances) are taking place.

Potential KPIs

- 1) **Statistics on poverty within the District correlated with survey results of investigation into: a) accepted indices of healthy eating b) accepted measures of participation in active travel c) accepted indications of exercise levels.**
- 2) **Evidence of take-up of free or reduced price services offered by the Council**

INTERIM CONCLUSION OF THE HEALTHY ROTHER WORKING GROUP

Healthy Rother has a rightful place as a separate theme of the Corporate Plan.

D APPENDIX 1. THE DISTRICT COUNCILS' NETWORK ON THE ROLE OF DISTRICT COUNCILS IN THE FIELD OF HEALTH

District councils play a key role in keeping us healthy. They provide core local services including economic development, planning, housing, leisure, well-being and environmental services for local communities - areas that are increasingly recognised as vital components of population health systems.

District Councils have a direct role in house building, homelessness prevention, housing adaptation and enforcement powers to improve the condition of private rented housing.

District councils provide better services and access to high quality green spaces. These are important to mental as well as physical health and have been shown to reduce the impact of income inequality on mental health and well-being.

District Councils provide a range of environmental health services including tackling pollution, food safety inspections, pest control and emergency planning.

A strong local economy is associated with a range of better physical and mental health outcomes, primarily through good quality stable employment. Unemployment can double the risk of premature death and one in seven men develop clinical depression within six months of losing their jobs.

District councils have an important role in sustainable and equitable economic development through their role in local enterprise partnerships, economic growth teams and other functions.

Economic development, housing and other District Council activities require active planning to maximise their health impacts.

District Council planners are key players in encouraging active commuting, adequate design and position of green spaces, affordable housing and equitable economic development.

Well-connected communities are good for health. Those with strong social relationships a 50% higher survival rate than those with poor social relationships.'

These themes have been developed further in papers by the Local Government Association, the government, the University of Kent and the King's Fund.

In order to develop Key Performance indicators, it would be helpful to act on the King's Fund recommendation that District Councils carry out more Health Impact Assessments (HIAs)

E. APPENDIX 2. HEALTHY ROTHER CAN BE INTRODUCED INTO THE CORPORATE PLAN AS A RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION

We would like to stress that we are citing the Chamber of Commerce response as an illustration. We are not endorsing either the Chamber of Commerce or its response, and we are not implying that the Chamber would necessarily support the inclusion of Healthy Rother in the Corporate Plan, or indeed any of the ideas contained in this paper; we are simply pointing out overlaps between their suggestions and ours, as we see it.

The introduction of 'Healthy Rother' can be truthfully presented as a response to the consultation. For example, in its official response, the Bexhill Chamber of Commerce called for 'eradication of the levels of deprivation in Sidley and Central Wards based on indices of deprivation', this connecting to the objective of eliminating health inequalities.

The Bexhill Chamber of Commerce also suggests *‘We would like to see RDC embrace the massive leisure opportunities that will be created by the staycation boom.’* Obviously, leisure is a major theme in the **‘Healthy Rother’** proposal.

The Chamber of Commerce says *‘There should also be plans to deliver Walking and Cycling routes in, around and to the 3 main towns and around all villages. Each village becoming a destination hub for cycling and walking facilities that would substantially boost their local economies with hospitality and other amenities. We should draw on the experience of other key walking/ cycle destinations like the Peak District/Moors for models of this.’* Cycling and Walking feature as Active Travel as one of the themes of **Healthy Rother**.

On Health, the Bexhill Chamber of Commerce comments that there is *‘no mention of improvement to be made on how to keep Rother a safe place to live work and play. Public health should be a key ongoing feature after Covid.’* This is a central rationale for the insertion of **‘Healthy Rother’** into the Corporate Plan.

On leisure and sports, the Bexhill Chamber of Commerce says *‘it is quite disturbing that there is nothing in the CP that recognises the need and demand for not just amenity sports facilities but significant destination leisure facilities- climbing walls, splash balls, wave pools, five aside pitches, tennis courts, squash courts, soft play areas, trampoline parks, skate parks, velodromes- these are what now attract and service visitors and locals needs. High quality leisure facilities are the drivers of demographic shift, high quality meritocracy employment, deprivation reduction and economic regeneration.’* These are important statements, emphasising that there is an intimate connection, not an antagonism, between the promotion of healthy activities and the promotion of economic health.

The Bexhill Chamber of Commerce concludes that it is not criticising the plan per se – *‘we are merely pointing out that as this is still the consultation stage, we would like to see an improved and more dynamic version created as a template for delivery over the next seven years.’* This call for revision in response to the consultation is a clear opportunity to insert into the Corporate Plan the subject of **‘Healthy Rother’**, under which heading a number of their themes belong.

F APPENDIX 3. Essex is a County but its work has been cited by the District Councils Network as an example to District Councils

“Essex County Council has been recognised as one of the most innovative local authorities in the country and that reputation is rooted in the council’s interpretation of the local government wellbeing power. As the United Kingdom moved into recession, Essex and its partners, recognised the need for effective action.

Here are some examples of its interventions: firstly, it provided direct financial assistance to economically vulnerable residents. Essex offered a one-off payment of £100 to its most economically vulnerable council taxpayers with the suggestion that this could be used to offset council tax bills. This is a policy that could be considered by the District Council if it feels unable to reduce to zero the council tax bills of its poorest and most struggling residents.

Secondly Essex increased the capacity of local credit unions. It pledged £170,000 over three years to support Essex Savers, the countywide credit union, and offered further support to smaller localised credit unions. This helped ensure that residents could get ethical and suitable sources of credit as bank lending contracted.

Thirdly, it stepped up its programme to reopen local post offices. It developed a massive grant programme to preserve threatened branches. As a result, ten branches were successfully reopened. “