

Report of	Assistant Director Environment	Author	Hayley McGrath ☎ 508902
Title	Update on Covid 19 Commemorations		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on our communities and continues to do so. Many people across the Borough have been impacted in terms of health and loss of loved ones, alongside the effects on businesses and jobs. Key workers continued to deliver vital services and many residents have volunteered to help those more vulnerable than themselves.
- 1.2 The Council would like to formally recognise the impact that the pandemic has had and lead the Borough in paying tribute to those that have been affected. As well as saying thank you to all those that have played a part in delivering services, help and support.
- 1.3 Although the pandemic is not over yet, it is felt appropriate to start considering what actions the Council can take to ensure that there is a fitting programme events, that can take place as soon as we are able to.
- 1.4 This report details some of the commemorative ideas that have been suggested already and sets out a proposed plan for developing ideas further. It is envisaged that there will be further reports to the Panel to agree a final programme of events.

2. Action Required

- 2.1 The Panel are requested to consider the details in this report and agree the proposals at section 5.
- 2.2 Suggest any further actions that they think should be considered for inclusion in the commemorations.

3. Reason for Review

- 3.1 The Policy Panel has been asked to consider suggestions for commemorative events and / or memorials with a view to making an overall recommendation to Cabinet about how the pandemic should be marked.

4. Background Information

4.1 There are three key areas of commemoration to be considered:

- Paying respects to those that passed away during the pandemic.
- Thanking key workers and volunteers for their efforts.
- A permanent memorial to all those that have been affected by the pandemic.

4.2 Paying Respects

4.2.1 The latest government figure for covid related deaths in Colchester is 408 since the start of the pandemic. However, many more families in the Borough have lost relatives since March 2020 and the restrictions that have been imposed have meant that they have not been able to commemorate their lives as they normally would have. Numbers able to attend funerals have been severely restricted and memorial events were not able to take place.

4.2.2 The Bishop of Colchester has highlighted that this has had a significant impact on peoples' ability to grieve.

4.2.3 Therefore, it is suggested that there should be a memorial service for all of those that have passed away since March 2020, from whatever cause.

4.2.4 The Mayor has been approached by the High Steward, Sir Bob Russell, who has suggested a format for the event, similar to the Festival of Remembrance that is held at the Royal Albert Hall each November. With the commemoration to be held in two halves – the first half, a more solemn service of remembrance, and the second half, an uplifting programme looking forward to the days ahead.

4.2.5 It is anticipated that this would be a free to attend event at Charter Hall, to take place sometime later in the year or possibly early next year, depending on how the pandemic continues.

4.2.6 The intention is to have this as multi-faith event, open to all sectors of our community. It is also hoped that the event could be replicated across the Borough. Whilst Charter Hall is central, not everyone will be able to go there. Therefore, working with faith and community groups, the idea is to set a format for the event that others can follow in their own areas such as village halls or places of worship. The intention being that over a set weekend the whole of the borough will be able to commemorate together. This could be titled something along the lines of 'Colchester Remembers'.

4.2.7 Alongside the festival type event the Cemetery and Crematorium are looking to hold a more intimate service in the grounds of the cemetery.

4.3 Thanking Key Workers & Volunteers

4.3.1 Early on in the pandemic the Council recognised the work of community champions across the borough with a community recognition award 'Together We Can' which recognised and celebrated community pride in neighbourhoods across the Borough and offered thanks to individuals and community groups who gave their time and efforts to create a lasting impact within their communities. Many of those nominated had provided support to others in their area during the initial lockdown.

- 4.3.2 However, the Mayor would like to host an event to thank key workers, across all sectors, and also make it a community celebration of better times ahead.
- 4.3.3 There are no firm details for this yet, but one suggestion is to have a community picnic in Castle Park with some events and entertainment.
- 4.3.4 We are also aware that the Borough Police Commander is keen to hold a community meet and greet day for the emergency services, and it may be possible to combine these events.

4.4 Permanent Memorials

- 4.4.1 It has been suggested that there should be some form of permanent memorial in Colchester to all those that have been affected by the pandemic, but there has not been any clear idea of what form that should take or where it should be placed.
- 4.4.2 However, any form of memorial will be an additional expense, both in terms of delivery and on-going maintenance, and it may be that the Council's role will be to enable / support a community approach - providing guidance on what steps need to be taken, where to look for sources of funding or how to crowd fund. Local memorials are also likely to be more meaningful.
- 4.4.3 It is proposed, however, to install a small memorial of some kind in the cemetery.
- 4.4.4 We are also aware that some Councillors are looking at using their locality budgets to install commemorative benches in their wards. It could be an option to have a bench and plaque designed, so that they all look the same and this could then be offered to community groups who have a small amount to spend on a memorial item in their area.
- 4.4.5 It may also be possible to do some form of tree planting, however it is likely that there will be a focus on trees for the Queens Platinum Jubilee celebrations next year.

4.5 Other Issues to consider

- 4.5.1 At this point in time, there is no clear indication of when the pandemic may be over. Therefore, it is hard to say exactly when events might take place. Whilst restrictions have currently been lifted, they could be reimposed if infection rates do not fall significantly. However, if restrictions are not reimposed it is hoped that a community thank you / celebration could be held in the autumn and the commemorative service could take place later in the winter.
- 4.5.2 Whilst there are no details, it is envisaged that there could be some form of national event to mark the second anniversary of Covid on 23 March 2022.
- 4.5.3 A small budget of £10,000 has been allocated for covid commemorations. This has not been allocated to any specific item and it is for this Panel to recommend the how the budget could be spent to Cabinet.
- 4.5.4 The Council is not the only organisation that is looking at how to remember the impact that the pandemic has had, and indeed the Council should not take the lead on all activities.

5.0 Proposal

5.1 At this stage is it proposed that:

- 5.1.1 The idea of a remembrance festival, that can be replicated across the Borough, is developed, with a programme for the event and how that can be shared with the community.
- 5.1.2 A community celebration event is arranged, working with other agencies such as the emergency services.
- 5.1.3 A design for a memorial bench and wording for the plaque is drawn up.
- 5.1.4 The Assistant Director Environment and the Corporate Governance Manager set up a small working group of relevant officers and representatives of other organisations, such as One Colchester and the BID, to ensure that covid commemorative activities are co-ordinated throughout the Borough and not all actions remain the responsibility of the Council.
- 5.1.5 An update report be submitted to the Panel at its meeting on 22 September 2021.

6.0 Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 6.1 There are no direct equality, diversity or human rights implications as a result of this report however it is intended that all covid commemorative actions will ensure that they are open to all sectors of the community.

7.0 Standard References

- 7.1 There are no particular references to the Strategic Plan; consultation or publicity considerations or financial; community safety; health and safety or risk management implications.

8.0 Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 8.1 There are no direct environmental and sustainability implications as a result of this report however and covid commemorative actions will be carried out will consider environmental and sustainability impacts.