

Report to :
Council

Agenda
Item

11(i)(b)

Meeting Date: 4th November 2014

Public/Private*: Public

Title: **Community Overview and Scrutiny Chairman's Report – Councillor
Rob Burns**

Not only, but also...

Let me apologise in advance for the length of this report, which reflects not only the fact that much has happened since the last one, but also, the as yet undiminished enthusiasm of the new boy in school. No doubt the reports will get shorter should I become disillusioned by the disappointment of unrequited expectation!

p.s Speed reading courses are available through the Members Learning and Development Programme.

the (seemingly) never ending story.....

Just when we thought the debate about the Old Fire Station had been happily concluded, a further call- in was requested, on the matter of the updated Business Plan. Fortunately, the issue was resolved with no great angst, but it did raise an interesting point about the use of call-ins generally.

In this case, all that was required was the provision of the estimated cost of time which would be spent by existing staff, directly on the operation of the Arts Centre, a figure which was readily produced.

This figure could have been made available without the necessity for a call-in, had Members requested it or indeed had the information been provided to members of the panel, knowing that it was they who had made the initial request that the amount should be included in the financial statement before the Business Plan was finally agreed by the Executive.

Call-ins are an important part of the Council's governance procedures, but they are devalued if they are used for anything other than to test the merits or seek a re-consideration of a decision. In my view this call-in did neither of those (discuss!).

The good news of course is that the matter **has** now been happily concluded and work has at last, begun on the development of the building.

I recall one of the earliest tasks in my role as an Officer of the Council (circa 1990), was to recruit for the newly created post of Community Arts Development Officer.

The advert asked, 'Are you up to the challenge of changing the perception of Carlisle as a cultural desert and artistic backwater?'

There have been a few false dawns and a few discarded Consultants reports along the way, but this facility is yet further proof that deserts can be cultivated!

Old dog....new tricks?

The Panel received an informative and interesting presentation from the Chair, Chief Executive and the Carlisle Area Manager from Carlisle Leisure Ltd. The minutes of the meeting record and reflect the discussion that prevailed following the presentation (I will not risk incurring the displeasure of Members of the Council by cutting and pasting the details here!), but Members of the Panel were generally agreed that the company was serving both the City Council and the people of the City well.

Much of the discussion referred to the proposed merger of CLL with Greenwich Leisure Ltd and the potential impact that might have on the company and its staff and on its ability to continue to deliver its contract with the City Council. Re-assurances were given but clearly there were important issues still to be considered and resolved.

The Chair of CLL agreed to a request that, following the results of the staff vote which would decide the outcome of the proposed merger, a further meeting with the COSP would be held specifically to discuss the merger (which has of course since been confirmed) and its potential impact on the future management of some of the Council's most important leisure/cultural/recreational facilities. I hope we may be able to open this meeting up for any interested Member to attend.

Both under the direct management of the Council and CLL, the Sands Centre has been a key component in the emergence of the city from the 'cultural desert' days referred to earlier, to the present status of growing multi cultural enlightenment and in the process, has developed and enviable level of public endorsement and affection.

Whilst changing its name from Rover to Fido may mean that the old dog will learn some new tricks, hopefully it will not change the essential nature of the beast.

The art of sucking eggs

Like Winston Churchill (we have so much in common!) I love learning, but hate being taught, which probably explains my dismal academic record compared to my record of reasonable achievement in the game of Trivial Pursuit.

So it was with no great enthusiasm that, together with nine fellow Members, I responded to the summons to attend a training day on the subject of understanding the principles and operation of effective overview and scrutiny.

At this point, for the story to be really interesting, there should I suppose, be an announcement of a 'eureka' moment, but alas that was not the case, although I confess that the tutor from INLOGOV did a fine job in maintaining everyone's interest in a topic about which, even the most ardent Local Government aficionado must find it difficult to drool over.

However, it was useful to be reminded of the true purpose of the overview and scrutiny process and to be re-assured by the tutor, who had previously been, amongst other things, the Director of Scrutiny for Birmingham City Council, that Carlisle City Council seems in the main, to be using the processes wisely and effectively.

This, together with the positive comments of the recent Peer Review team concerning our use of O&S, affirmed therefore that we didn't really need to be teaching our granny to suck eggs after all!

To be or not to be.....

(involved) ...that is the question that the Member Involvement Task Group are seeking the views of fellow Members of the Council on, with regard to whether they feel they are, or wish to be, involved as much as they'd like, in the policy and decision making processes of the City Council.

A questionnaire was recently distributed to all Members with the view of assessing the level of disenchantment, if there is any.

The Task Group was set up on the basis of mainly anecdotal evidence, that a significant number of Members do not feel fully engaged, so the questionnaire is designed to help get a more accurate picture and a 100% response would be very helpful in that regard.

All Members are therefore urged to complete it as honestly as possible and if the responses suggest there is an issue worthy of further review, then the Task Group will set about trying to investigate it.

'The only really effective mechanism for corporate governance is the active involvement of the owners' So said Louis V Gerstner Jnr, ex Chair of IBM and American Express and so say all of us.... presumably!

'We come equals into this world'...

The COSP received a report indicating that the Council's Comprehensive Equality Scheme is to be reviewed and updated over the next few months, with a wide ranging cohort of opinion and advice being sought, before the revised policy is presented for approval early next summer.

Although the Equality Scheme is produced as part of the Council's Public Sector Equality Duty, we should acknowledge that our approach to the development of such a policy is to do it, not because it is a duty to do so, but because we believe that it is the right thing to do.

This approach in my view, will make the Scheme a more relevant and meaningful plan which will seek genuinely to provide a framework to reach out to all sectors of the community including individuals, as we all have a 'protected characteristic', as the minutes of the discussion at the meeting show.

This Scheme should itself stand equally amongst all the Council's other headline policies, for unless all our citizens are considered equal, we are all equally diminished. I hope as many Members as possible will take the opportunity to be involved in this Review.

Healthy lightbites

No, not free samples of low calorie doughnuts for all Members, but some bite size snippets of interest arising from the last meeting of the Cumbria Health Scrutiny Panel on 16th October.

The transfer of the 'Step Up, Step Down' care at Reiver House into a community setting, is on schedule to be completed by the end of October and from then, as part of a range of improvements to cancer services, the building will be used to deliver new chemotherapy services.

The 'Step Up, Step Down' transfer took place as part of the extension of the Mrs Carlisle Hospital at Home pilot scheme, which has been selected from a list of over 200 schemes worldwide, to be presented at the World Health Organisation's Healthy Cities Conference in Athens later this year. Emma Dixon, the City Council's Partnership Development Officer, will be one of the presenting team.

The issue of car parking at the Cumberland Infirmary is currently the subject of an investigation being carried out by Healthwatch Cumbria, with a view to identifying possible solutions. It seems that some progress has been made by the North Cumbria University Hospitals Trust in identifying additional land for parking. Watch this space! (which is about all you can do in the car park at the moment!)

Reports were received outlining some significant developments presently underway, in an attempt to improve some key areas of health service delivery in Cumbria, including the development of a new, comprehensive Mental Health Strategy and a major review of the current configuration of maternity services across the county.

It was also reported that due to many vital safety and quality changes made over the past 18 months, the mortality rate in North Cumbria hospitals, which had been recorded as being one of the highest in England, has seen a sustained and continuing decline.

I will notify Members when the full minutes of the Panel's meeting are available.