

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY 6 APRIL 2017 AT 10.00AM

PRESENT: Councillor Burns (Chairman), Councillors Bloxham (as substitute for Councillor Layden), Ellis, McDonald (as substitute for Councillor Ms Williams), Mrs McKerrell, McNulty, Paton, and Mrs Riddle.

OFFICERS: Deputy Chief Executive
Contracts and Community Services Manager
Arts Development Officer
Overview and Scrutiny Officer

COSP.19/17 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Layden, MsWilliams, and Councillor Quilter – Culture, Leisure and Heritage Portfolio Holder.

COSP.20/17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest affecting the business to be transacted at the meeting.

COSP.21/17 PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED – That the Agenda be agreed as circulated.

COSP.22/17 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED (1) – That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2017 be signed by the Chairman.

(2) That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 February 2017 be noted.

COSP.23/17 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

There were no items which had been the subject of call-in.

COSP.24/17 FLOOD UPDATE REPORT

The Deputy Chief Executive provided the Panel with a verbal update on the Council's flood recovery programme covering: the Council's Asset Recovery Programme, including the Civic Centre and Customer Contact Centre; Bitts Park; Flood Grants and Household Payments and the ongoing work of organisations involved in flood recovery.

The Deputy Chief Executive outlined a timetable for the recovery of flood damaged Council properties as follows:

Warwick St properties	Complete and settled
Adriano's	06/2016 - 04/2017
Sands Centre and Swifts	Complete and settled
Stoney Holme (inc. Depot)	10/2016 - 05/2017
John St properties (Hostel and Annex)	06/2016 - 05/2017
Shaddongate Resource Centre	06/2016 - 05/2017
Botcherby Community Centre	06/2016 - 05/2017

Bits Park (Depot, Lodge, Pavilion & WCs)	Dates to be confirmed awaiting design/costings
Caldew Riverside Properties (demolition)	06/2016 - 04/2017
Old Fire Station	Complete
Sheepmount - final programme still to be determined following conclusion of insurance negotiations	10/2016 – 06/2017

Regarding Bits Park, it was noted that the upper tennis courts had been open to the public since Easter 2016, permanent repair works to the fencing and floodlighting for those courts had also been completed. The lower tennis courts remained out of action, the Deputy Chief Executive explained that the resurfacing and redevelopment work would be undertaken as part of the Canopy Project which the Council was undertaking in conjunction with the Lawn Tennis Association.

In terms of flood grants the Deputy Chief Executive advised that as at 31st December 2016 1,670 households had been confirmed as flooded by Storm Desmond, of those 1,602 were eligible for the £500 Community Support Grant. The Council had made payments to 1,567 households which equated to 97.84% of applicants and had a total financial value of £783,500.

In considering the verbal update Members raised the following comments and questions:

- Had tenants who had been re-housed from the Council's John Street accommodation, following the flood been able to access the support services ordinarily provided at the John Street facility?

The Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder advised that the Council had leased an additional building to provide housing for those tenants displaced from John Street, this had enabled the Council to meet its requirement in relation to homelessness provision. She confirmed that support services had been continued to be provided to John Street tenants, and praised the Officers involved for their work in response to the flood, which had in the disaster response phase ensured that all tenants requiring re-homing had been provided with suitable alternative accommodation within two days of the floods.

- Had the incorporation of additional flood resilience measures into the Council's assets caused delays in the asset recovery programme?

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that as part of the Council's negotiations with its insurers discussions had been undertaken regarding the need to incorporate additional resilience measures into Council assets during the recovery programme.

Regarding Botcherby Community Centre a number of electrical issues had been identified, the Centre Manager was involved in on-going dialogue with contractors to achieve the best solution for the facility.

A Member commented that he had understood that Botcherby Community Centre would re-open in April 2017, he sought clarification on this issue.

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that the May completion of works at the site was the end date by which the Centre would be re-opened.

The Member noted that Botcherby Community Centre had been identified as a polling station site for the Local Elections in May 2017, he sought assurance that a contingency plan was in place to provide those facilities in the event that works at the Centre had not been completed.

Another Member noted that Botcherby Community Centre had been closed for a significant amount of time, he asked if the Council was able to offer any support in publicising the re-opening of the facility, following the completion of the recovery works.

The Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder advised that she has met with the Centre Manager and discussed the progress of the recovery works and what actions were needed to attract users back to the Centre. She was developing a plan in conjunction with the Contracts and Community Services Manager to address these issues.

- Had plans been made regarding the Depot and Lodge at Bitts Park?

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that an insurance settlement had not yet been agreed for the Depot and Lodge, therefore definitive plans for those facilities had not been agreed. A feasibility assessment was being conducted, the results from which would enable Officers to develop plans for the Depot and Lodge, following which proposals would be submitted to the Executive for consideration.

- Were toilet facilities available at Bitts Park?

The Contracts and Community Services Manager confirmed that temporary toilet facilities were available at Bitts Park. He further advised that, in order to meet the increase in the number of users of the park during the spring/summer months, additional temporary toilet facilities were being provided at the Park.

- Did Bitts Park have a Warden?

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that a Warden no longer managed the Park, that role was undertaken by Rangers from the Green Spaces Team.

- Were track and hockey facilities in operation at the Sheepmount?

The Contracts and Community Services Manager advised that the track facilities at the Sheepmount were in operation and being used by a number of clubs within the city, as were the football pitches at the facility.

Regarding hockey, the Contracts and Community Services Manager explained that the astro-turf pitches provided for this activity at the Sheepmount were declining in popularity with users as other facilities in the city, for example, Harraby Community Campus now offered third generation synthetic pitches. It was felt that there was sufficient supply of the new generation pitches to meet the demand within the District.

The Deputy Chief Executive added that no decision had been taken in relation to the synthetic pitches at the Sheepmount, as an insurance settlement had not been agreed. Further details on the matter would be provided to Members in due course.

- How much progress had been made on plans for the ground floor of the Civic Centre?

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that Officers were awaiting confirmation of the insurance settlement prior to the presentation of plans to the Executive.

A Member asked whether consideration had been given to the renting out of space within the Civic Centre building.

The Deputy Chief Executive responded that this issue had been considered, however, feedback had indicated a low level of interest in the types of spaces available within the building amongst both private and public sector organisations. He felt that the approach to marketing the spaces available in the building required review to ensure the benefits of the building were clearly outlined.

A Member requested that when firm plans for the ground floor of the Civic Centre had been developed, they be presented to all Members of the Council at an Informal Briefing. The Panel agreed this proposal.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Deputy Chief Executive be thanked for the update to the Panel.

(2) That proposals regarding the reinstatement of the ground floor of the Civic Centre be presented to Members at an Informal Council Briefing.

COSP.25/17 OLD FIRE STATION ARTS CENTRE (PROGRESS AND PERFORMANCE REPORT)

The Contracts and Community Services Manager submitted report CS.07/17 Old Fire Station Arts Centre (Progress and Performance Report) which provided an update on the performance and operation at the Old Fire Station (OFS), since its opening in May 2015.

The report detailed the impact of the December 2015 flood on the OFS and the action taken to relocate a number of shows to different venues within the city. The OFS had reopened in September 2016 with increased demand for the venue which had exceeded its booking capacity.

The Arts Development Officer explained that the OFS was establishing itself as a venue within the city prior to its closure as a result of the December 2015 floods. Whilst the flooding of the site had presented challenges in terms of forcing the closure of the OFS, it had also provided an opportunity for the Council to take stock of how the facility was operated.

Since its re-opening, the OFS aimed to put on more driven and community based events. In addition, the University of Cumbria had taken over the “Dormitory Room”, as an exhibition space and it was hoped that arrangement would continue on a long-term basis. Consideration was also being given to the feasibility of implementing similar arrangements in other rooms within the OFS.

The programme of events at the OFS was now booked up to November 2018, Officers intended to keep the programming at the OFS under review to ensure that it was interesting and appealing to all residents within the city.

In conclusion, the Arts Development Officer noted that since its opening the OFS had developed a profile at national level, with event promoters being keen to hold events at the facility, which was seen as being well placed, geographically.

In considering the report Members raised the following comments and questions:

- Was it the Council’s intention for the OFS to become financially self-sufficient?

The Arts Development Officer considered financial greater self-sufficiency to be a longer term serious aspiration for the OFS, he noted that the programming of events was likely to play an important part in the financial success of the OFS.

- A Member sought clarification on the financial information contained in paragraph 3.2 of the report.

The Contracts and Community Services Manager explained that the reference to "... actual expenditure is £306,654 (23/07/2017) contained a typographical error and should read 23/03/2017. The Contracts and Community Services Manager further summarised the financial information contained within the report.

- A Member sought clarification on the difference between "general rent" and "let rent"

The Contracts and Community Services Manager explained that "general rent" referred to room bookings, whereas "let rent" referred to longer term lease arrangements. Profit sharing fees for meals and refreshments were paid annually to the Council following the auditing of the providers annual accounts.

- Were the arrangements for the return of funds from meals and refreshments normal practice?

The Contracts and Community Services Manager explained that the returns from the food provide were paid on an annual basis following the auditing of the providers accounts.

The Member expressed concern that such an arrangement may lead to a situation in which the food provider was unable to make payment to the Council.

The Contract and Community Services Manager acknowledged the Member's concerns, he explained that the food and refreshment provision at the OFS was operated on a profit-share arrangement which meant that the provider only had rights to deliver catering in the building, rather than a lease arrangement. The caterer provided the Council with quarterly information regarding finance, with the Council invoicing for payment on an annual basis.

- A Member commented that it was difficult to fully scrutinise the budget information provided in the report as the OFS had not traded for a full financial year, due to its closure following the floods. Referring to the net annual budget figure indicated as £251,800 in the report, he sought clarification that this was the amount of funding agreed through the Council's budget process, and what proportion of the £251,800 was Council grant.

The Contracts and Community Services Manager confirmed that the £251,800 indicated in the report was the net budget position as agreed by Council. Discussion then followed regarding the factors which made up the net budget including central re-charges and accommodation and support charges

The Member remained concerned that the financial data contained in the report was not in line with the budget forecasting in the Arts Centre Business Planor that which was agreed through the Council's Budget process.

The Chairman commented that Members felt there was a lack of clarity on the issue and asked that further information be provided to enable Members to effectively scrutinise the matter.

The Contracts and Community Services Manager undertook to provide the Panel with a written reconciliation of the financial data contained within the Business Plan and the Council budget to enable Members' full understanding of the budgetary position of the OFS.

The Chairman requested that the information be presented to the Panel in a report at its June 2017 meeting.

The Contracts and Community Services Manager responded suggesting that the information be circulated in the form of a written response to the Panel, should Members then wish to consider the matter at June meeting of the Panel, an item would be included on the agenda. This course of action was agreed by the Panel.

- The Chairman noted that the OFS had been set up with a view to developing the arts and culture offer within the city, he asked if there was a need for the Council to develop a wider Cultural Strategy for the city.

The Arts Development Officer responded that a key factor in developing arts and cultural activities within the city was space and how to use it effectively. The Council was already developing work and partnerships with external organisations with a view to expanding the arts and cultural activities within the city. In addition the Council also sign-posted arts and cultural organisations within the city to national organisations such as the Arts Council to support their activities.

The Leader considered that the city had made great strides in increasing its output of arts and cultural activities which had led to a growth in confidence within the sector both in the city and outside. He felt that the Council was best able to support to the city's arts and cultural life by bringing partners together, and considering how best to market events to residents and tourists.

- Was the prevalence of male ticket buyers reflected in the usage of the OFS?

The Arts Development Officer advised that during the day the majority of users were female, the majority of male ticket buyers indicated in the report may be a reflection of the programme of events, this was an area that would continue to be monitored.

The Contracts and Community Services Manager added that the data collected from ticket purchasers provided a useful analytical tool for monitoring the overall performance of the OFS and assessing the programme of events going forward.

- How was overbooking at the OFS managed?

The Arts Development Officer explained that in the event of an overbooking, consideration would be given to the wider programme of events, and the demand/popularity of individual events to determine which events should be progressed.

- How was postcode information gathered from ticket purchasers?

The Arts Development Manager explained when tickets were purchased electronically buyers were able to select whether to provide their postcode data. Buyers purchasing tickets

directly from the OFS were given a card which allowed postcode data to be provided, however, it was stressed that ticket purchasers were not under any obligation to provide the data.

RESOLVED - (1) That report CS.07/17 Old Fire Station Arts Centre (Progress and Performance Report) be noted.

(2) That the Contracts and Community Services Manager provided a written response reconciling the financial data contained within the Old Fire Station Business Plan and the funding agreed in the Council's Budget. Following submission of the information, the Chairman of the Panel would make a decision as to whether a full report to the next meeting of the Panel was required.

COSP.26/17 OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer submitted report OS.08/17 which provided an overview of matters relating to the work of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel and included the latest version of the work programme and Key Decisions of the Executive which related to the Panel.

The Notice of Executive Key Decisions had been published on 10 March 2017 and there were no items within the remit of the Panel.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised that the Panel had completed its Work Programme for the year 2017/18. At its meeting of 16 February, the Panel had requested a report on the apparent increase in rough sleeping and begging in the City Centre, be included in the Work Programme for presentation at the earliest opportunity. The report was to be included on the agenda of the Panel's June 2017 meeting.

Members no questions or comments on the Work Programme.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Overview Report incorporating the Work Programme and Key Decision items relevant to this Panel (OS.08/17) be noted.

(Meeting ended at 11:35am)