

CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel was held on 28 July 2020.

PRESENT:**1 MINUTES - CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL - 27 FEBRUARY 2020**

The Minutes were submitted and approved as a true record.

2 OVERVIEW OF SERVICE AREAS

The Director of Regeneration and Culture provided the Panel with an overview of the Services he was responsible for.

As part of the presentation the following points were made:

- Cultural Services now fell within the Regeneration and Culture Directorate.
- The service sat alongside Economic growth, Infrastructure, Planning, Capital Projects, Design Services and Housing.
- Cultural Services was broken into three main areas; Venues - encompassing the Town Hall, Middlesbrough Theatre and Newham Grange Leisure Farm, all of which attracted high visitor numbers; Museums, namely the Dorman and the Captain Cook Birthplace Museum and Open Spaces including Stewart and Albert Parks.
- Cultural Services also had a budget covering a range of events including the Orange Pip Market and Christmas events such as the Reindeer Parade. It also contributed to events such as the Mela and Discover Middlesbrough. Cultural Services worked to empower other organisations in terms of raising funds to hold their own events.
- The contract with Sports and Leisure Management (trading as Everyone Active) also fell under Cultural Service's remit as well as playing field provision. It was commented this aspect of the service was a particularly busy period given the Covid Pandemic.
- Cultural Services was also responsible for Arts Development, which were projects that aimed to engage the community. These projects not only brought cultural positives, but also linked with other benefits, such as public health and economic benefits.
- The aforementioned activities were the business as usual position but the Covid Pandemic had changed this position significantly.
- Of the areas within the Regeneration and Culture Directorate, Cultural Services had been the most significantly affected as most of its activity had stopped.
- The Town Hall and Theatre had to completely closed, and it was difficult to programme events for those venues which was normally done six months in advance.
- National tours scheduled for September 2020 would not go ahead as social distancing would still have been in place, making the performance uneconomical for the artist. However, it was explained that both performer and Town Hall would be reluctant to cancel the event as they would be subject to a cancellation fee.
- Consequently, the Town Hall was essentially waiting for performers to cancel their tours and had done so for several shows.
- There were plans to restart some activity in the Town Hall and Theatre but this would be small scale and would not be commercial.
- Any forward programming contained additional clauses in case circumstances changed.
- All other venues were closed between March and July with a gradual re-opening taking place. Newham Grange Farm was re-opening in July and was fully booked. However, the bookings were a maximum of 350 people per day, where ordinarily this would have been closer to 2,000 people.
- The events programme had been completely cancelled with no funds committed to any of those activities.
- There were exploratory plans to hold an outdoor event, possibly in September. This was difficult to arrange given current Government versus public apprehension.
- Cultural Service's priorities for 2020/21 included a need to reopen all of the venues safely. It was explained that while the Town Hall was open, this was different to

holding a large event. It was also explained that any re-opening processes would be in line with public health guidance.

- There was a need to try and retain customer interest as customers may choose to visit other venues. Initiatives to achieve this included online marketing and the possibility of livestreaming some events.
- A significant issue, and one that was present before the Covid Pandemic, was the future management of the Town Hall.
- It was explained that when the Town Hall re-opened after its refurbishment it was not successful.
- A number of options were explored and it was decided to enter into a partnership with the SAGE in Gateshead. This had been in place for four to five months, with the SAGE offering assistance with the Town Hall's programming and marketing. However, while this partnership was going well, many planned events had been cancelled due to the Covid Pandemic. It was anticipated that the partnership with the SAGE would be extended.
- The Town Hall and Theatre needed to be programmed more closely together. It was also apparent that due to the use of a single ticketing system, customers purchasing tickets for one venue were also looking at events at other venues.
- In terms of Christmas activities there needed to be a plan put into place for Social Distancing.
- The situation surrounding the Covid Pandemic had afforded more time to explore the events programme for 2021/22.

A Member thanked Cultural Service's efforts in trying to maintain an effective cultural offer for Middlesbrough.

A Member asked what the cost to the Council would be with venues being closed. It was explained costs were being masked due to the Town Hall not being fully open; some posts being held vacant and funding from the Arts Council. In terms of the Town Hall and Theatre, while there was a cost it was not significant at the moment. It was also explained that there were high aspirations for Newham Grange Farm and the recoverable costs for this would be minimal.

A Member commented that plans for Remembrance Sunday were in a state of flux and that when they were put in place they would be publicised. It was commented that Remembrance Sunday was a good example of how events have been affected in light of the Covid Pandemic. For example, while held in the same format each year, planning the event occurred months in advance.

A Member queried what support and assistance was being offered to smaller retailers in the Town, such as those attending the Orange Pip Market. It was clarified this was a mixed picture, as not all businesses were happy when the Orange Pip Market took place. This was the same situation with support being offered by the Council, namely that not all support packages were wholly suitable for all businesses. The optimal means of providing support was continuing to promote businesses presence and to help them trade as safely as possible.

A Member queried the status of the Town Hall's partnership with the SAGE. It was confirmed the Senior Management Team at the SAGE was assisting the Senior Management Team at the Town Hall in regards of Marketing. For example, the SAGE were guiding the Town Hall rather than undertaking the work for the Town Hall.

A Member queried what form the re-opening of the Town Hall would take and would all amenities, such as the cafe, be included in the re-opening. It was confirmed the re-opening would be a phased approach but some amenities may be different. For example the cafe would be brought back in house following the departure of the current operator. It was also confirmed that an agreement had been reached with the Ministry of Justice to host some Court operations in the Town Hall in efforts to reduce the back-log of caseloads. Overall, it was envisaged the building would re-open over a period of six months, perhaps longer, and that exploratory work to reintroduce small comedy shows was being undertaken.

A Member commented they were re-assured by the efforts being made to re-open the Town

Hall and attract visitors.

A Member queried what plans were in place for Christmas activities. It was confirmed that the installation of the Christmas tree and lights was still planned. With regards to the Snowmen art installation there were potential plans to locate them in different places. It was also confirmed that any decision about Christmas activities needed to be considered carefully as they could impact on both the public and traders. An example was provided whereby an installation designed to move large crowds around the town centre would benefit Town Centre traders as opposed to activities that could be taken into the community.

A Member queried what plans had been made for the Christmas Pantomime. It was confirmed that due to the profile and income generation of the Pantomime the Council would wait until absolutely necessary before making a decision on whether to cancel the event or not.

The Chair thanked the Director of Regeneration and Culture for his presentation.

The Director for Environment and Commercial Services provided the Panel with an overview of the services he was responsible for.

As part of the presentation the following points were made:

- There were three parts of the Community Protection element of the directorate; libraries and community hubs; community safety and migration.
- Out the outbreak of the Covid Pandemic all Libraries and Hubs closed very quickly with staff moving into Covid response roles.
- Libraries were in the process of re-opening and would be doing so on the 4 August with a click and collect service operating for Books.
- Community Hubs would be operating over a two to three day period initially.
- All premises had been risk assessed to ensure they were Covid Secure.
- The Council was also looking to bring the volunteer service back so they could continue to assist with Covid recovery.
- Community Safety comprised strategic and operational dimensions with the Community Safety aspect of the service currently under review.
- Strategically, the Community Safety Partnership and the development of and maintenance of the Community Safety Plan was crucial.
- This was currently being redrafted and it was hoped a final version would be implemented within a month.
- Community Safety was also responsible for taking forward actions arising from Domestic Homicide case reviews.
- Operationally, the service was responsible for the Neighbourhood Warden Service which had been significantly expanded recently. The service was seven months into its operations and had significantly assisted with the Covid response.
- A priority for the service was to develop a more focused view of Neighbourhood Safety Warden activities.
- The service was also responsible for community cohesion, with the Director of Environment and Commercial Services working closely with the Local Resilience Forum.
- It was commented that one of Middlesbrough's Strengths was its diverse population.
- An important initiative for the service was Locality Working which sought to base some Council operations in the Communities.
- This had been delayed by several months due to the Covid Pandemic.
- One of the main objectives of Locality Working was to address the issues facing respective locations and collectively resolve them.
- The service also hosted the North East Migration Partnership, which was a coordinating role for Local Authorities across the North East.
- The priorities for the service were to get Libraries and Hubs back into safe operation; to ensure that the Community Safety Partnerships ambitions were set; to review the community safety element of the service; to continue to push for locality working plans and to continue with the work of the migration partnership.

A Member queried if there were plans for Middlesbrough to receive an equal number of refugees and asylum seekers relative the North East as a whole. It was confirmed that migration numbers were lower than they were previously and that this was due to national plans in terms of dispersal.

The Chair thanked the Director of Environment and Commercial Services for his presentation.

AGREED that the Panel note the information presented.

3 **SETTING THE SCRUTINY PANEL'S WORK PROGRAMME 2020/2021**

The Chair presented a report, the purpose of which was to assist Members of the Panel to consider and agree its work programme for the 2020-2021 Municipal Year.

A list of topical issues and the suggestions received in respect of the scrutiny panel's remit were contained in the submitted report. It was suggested that the Scrutiny Panel should select two topics for full review along with several updates.

In addition there was one review from the previous year to be completed as follows: Social Cohesion.

Members discussed the topics suggested in the report.

Following discussion, Panel Members agreed the following topics for review:

Main Topics:

1. The Impact of Middlesbrough's Cultural Strategy.
2. Integrated Enforcement Team (IET)

Updates:

1. Operation Phoenix.
2. Regulatory Investigative Powers (RIPA).
3. Preventing Terrorism.
4. Community Safety Partnership.
5. Selective Landlord Licensing.

AGREED that:

1. The information provided was received and noted.
2. The topics and reviews listed above, would be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Board for approval.

4 **PROPOSED MEETING SCHEDULE - 2020/2021 MUNICIPAL YEAR**

A proposed schedule of meeting dates for the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel for the 2020-2021 Municipal Year was submitted for the Panel's consideration.

The Democratic Services Officer noted an amendment to the report as follows:

- Thursday 11 November 2020 should have read Thursday 12 November 2020.

AGREED that the proposed meeting dates for 2020-2021 were approved.

5 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE

The Chair advised the Panel that OSB received updates from the Executive Member for Regeneration and the Executive Director of Growth and Place, who spoke about efforts to reinvigorate the Town's economy following the impact of the Covid Pandemic.

The Board also received an update from the Chief Executive regarding Middlesbrough's ongoing efforts to implement Test, Track and Trace as well as providing an update on the Council's financial position in the wake of Covid-19.

AGREED that the information presented be noted.