

CULTURAL PROVISION REVIEW GROUP

17th May, 2012

PRESENT – Councillors Carson, Cossins, Harman, L. Hughes Lewis and Long (in the Chair).

APOLOGIES – Councillors Baldwin and Grundy.

OFFICERS – Mike Crawshaw, Cultural Services Manager, Steve Petch, Head of Strategy and Commissioning and Claire Hutton, Democratic Officer.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Kelley.

Purpose of the Meeting – To consider the position of the interim arrangements for Cultural Provision.

Points Discussed and Considered -

- Mike Crawshaw, Cultural Services Manager circulated a programme that had been developed detailing the position in relation to the relocation of each of the organisations currently using the Arts Centre and the discussions that have taken place with each of them and options for their proposed future location.
- The Group were advised that the Arts Centre would be closing on 7th July, 2012, and that the Cultural Services Manager was working closely with Audit/Estates to implement an exit strategy.
- The Group were informed of the position in relation to the staff at the Arts Centre, the majority of whom would be in redundancy situation, and a small number redeployed and the Cultural Services Manager paid tribute to the professionalism of all staff involved during this difficult time.
- In relation to the relocation of Theatre Hullabaloo, it was envisaged that this would be relocated to the Friends Meeting House in Skinnergate and that the Bondgate Players were currently looking at alternative venues and negotiations were in place.
- Darlington Media Group has been involved with the relocation of Darlo Velo and the Chair suggested that it may be appropriate for Darlo Velo to link in with the Local Motion Transport team.
- A Member raised a question in relation to whether the Authority would be assisting organisations with the cost of moving their equipment and were informed that the Authority would continue to support organisations although details were still being developed.
- It was envisaged that, although resources were limited, the Rhythm and Blues Festival would continue in the future. Last year it was scaled down and was still very well attended. The Rhythm and Blues Club have relocated to Central Hall and will be performing every three weeks.

- With regard to Open Arts, the Group were advised that funding had been secured and it would be relocated to the Bridge where there would be good transport links and is within close proximity to the town centre.
- Following a question, the Group were advised that the Authority would no longer be delivering a wide programme of courses and that Arts Tutors would have the opportunity to deliver course in the future from the Bridge.
- The Cultural Services Manager informed the Group that there would be a showcase event at the Arts Centre on Thursday, 5th July, 2012 to celebrate the last 30 years and also advertise the future locations/venues of organisations.
- The Chair requested that a copy of the programme detailing the position in relation to the relocation of each Art Centre Organisation be circulated and uploaded to the website so residents were aware of the situation.
- Particular reference was made to the vacant possession of the Arts Centre and Members were informed that, once the site had closed in July, it would be handed to the Estates Section of the Council and that they were currently exploring security and the possibility of leasing the site short term. The Group requested that Richard Adamson, Estates Officer be invited to attend a future meeting to update them on the work that they have undertaken.
- The Group referred to the future of the Etching Press and where this could be relocated and it was suggested that it could be situated at the Railway Museum, which was an option that was being explored.
- Questions were raised in relation to the storage of the piano, the looms and weaves, lighting rigs and whether these could be used at the Civic Theatre and the future of the water sculpture 'Threshold'. The Cultural Manager responded to the questions raised and highlighted that appropriate storage had been identified for the piano and that some equipment could be used at the Civic Theatre, although he was working closely with Audit for advice. In relation to the sculpture, Members were advised that funding was involved and that he had written to Angela Connor who designed the sculpture informing her of the Authority's position and that no response had been received to date.
- Concerns were raised in relation to the current position of the cultural policy and what its aims and objectives were and the Group were advised that there was no overall Cultural Strategy. The Arts vision was now clearly articulated through the Creative Darlington process. The Chair stated that the Group should define how they feel and what they can do in relation to the policy.
- A Member referred to the vision for Creative Arts, which is the provision to facilitate Arts to help them to grow and flourish in Darlington.
- The Group were advised that £100,000 had been ring fenced for The Creative Darlington Board which included staffing costs and that Stephen Wiper had been appointed the Creative Darlington Manager to support the Board. It was highlighted that Darlington for Culture had one seat on the Creative Darlington Board, with the vision of it being the umbrella body for the organisations. The Chair endorsed the Creative Darlington Board approach and looked forward to the work of the Board.

- The Chair requested an update in relation to the position with the Arts Council for the mixed-use hub and it was highlighted that the Council were unsuccessful with their bid, however, there was continuous dialogue with the Arts Council and the Council had been advised to look at their business plan.
- The Group were also advised of the refurbishment of Crown Street Art Gallery and the grand opening on Saturday, 19th May, 2012.
- Following a question in relation to the Borough Art Collection, the Cultural Manager advised that all options were currently being considered and that it may be placed in the basement of Crown Street library and be displayed in the gallery, although no firm decision had been agreed. Members requested that all aspects in relation to flooding, storage, racking and security be considered before any decision was made.
- The Group were pleased to see that the Creative Darlington Board has agreed that the Chair of Place Scrutiny may attend meetings as an observer and that minutes of their meetings would be forwarded to Place Scrutiny.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That thanks be conveyed to Mike Crawshaw and Lynda Winstanley for the work/programme they have developed on the relocation of each Art Centre Organisation.

(b) That Richard Adamson update this Group on the work that Estates are undertaking on the possibility of short term leasing the Arts Centre.

(d) That the next meeting of this Group be arranged in consultation with the Chair.