

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 22 April 2021

PRESENT – Councillors Renton (Chair), Mrs Culley, Barch, Cossins, Donoghue, Durham, Haszeldine, McCollom, Tait and Wallis

APOLOGIES – Councillor Allen

ABSENT –

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Curry, Harker and Mrs D Jones

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Ian Thompson (Assistant Director Community Services), Brian Graham (Head of Environmental Services), Mark Ladyman (Assistant Director Economic Growth), Mike Crawshaw (Head of Leisure and Cultural Services), Heather Tarran-Jones (Programming and Performance Director), Suzy Hill (Library Manager) and Hannah Fay (Democratic Officer)

CLS37 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

CLS38 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY HELD ON 25 FEBRUARY 2021

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 25 February 2021.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 25 February 2021 be approved as a correct record.

CLS39 INDOOR AND OUTDOOR MARKETS

The Assistant Director Economic Growth and Managing Director of Market Asset Management gave a presentation, updating Members on the progress made to date on the redevelopment of Indoor Market and an update on plans for the Outdoor Market.

It was reported that the outdoor market had faced a number of challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; phase one of the redevelopment, which included six street food kiosks, a bar and stage, new entrance and toilets, commenced in January and was progressing well; asbestos had been identified which delayed vacant possession of the site; and that the pre-letting for the street food kiosks was going well. In addition, the roofing work had almost been completed and furniture had been ordered.

Details were provided on phase two of the development; this was due to commence in May; would include work to the remaining shop floor and new entrances; and as part of phase two traders would be assisted in applying for grants to refurbish their own stalls. MAM were awaiting planning permission to commence phase three,

temperate gardens and the anticipated completion date for work was Christmas.

Members were advised that MAM were working closely with the Council in developing a programme of events and activity to relaunch the market, including the recommencement of the Pease pudding market next month; the night time economy would include family entertainment; and the markets would become a regional attraction.

Following a question by Members in relation to the support for outdoor market traders Members were advised that MAM were in the process of developing an outdoor market strategy detailing how stalls would be attracted to Darlington and this would be shared with Members; that there were a good number of stalls in the market square; and acknowledged that it had been a difficult year for markets due to the pandemic. It was agreed that Members be provided with occupancy levels to gauge the success or otherwise of both the indoor and outdoor market.

Following a question by Members in respect of the contract terms and conditions for potential street food traders, it was confirmed that the street food traders would not be charged flat rent or service charge and would instead be charged a variable turnover rent; and a mutual break clause would be included in the contract should a trader wish to leave.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be noted.

CLS40 DARLINGTON LIBRARIES

The Library Manager gave a presentation (previously circulated) on Darlington Libraries and in doing so advised Members that public libraries were governed by legislation ensuring that all members of society had free access to library materials and that it was the duty of every library authority to provide “a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof.”

The presentation detailed the services provided by both Darlington and Cockerton Library; and the refurbishment of Darlington Library, including improvements to the Cockerton Library were outlined.

It was reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had accelerated the work on the digital offer available to residents; online membership was implemented at the beginning of the pandemic, with 870 new members signing up since March 2020. Members were advised that the digital offer was promoted and noted a large increase in digital borrowing, from 24,426 issues in 2019-2020 to 58,489 issues in 2020-2021; and that the Council had invested in a library app, allowing members to self-manage their accounts and to facilitate borrowing safely during the pandemic.

Members were informed of the library home delivery service which had been extended due to the pandemic to any resident 60 years of age or over living in Darlington; that this service delivers to 280 households every month with the help of Darlington Support; and reference was made to the online activities provided to families and resources provided to schools and nurseries.

The presentation outlined figures for borrowing, including a breakdown of adult and

junior lending; the recommended changes to the library service performance indicators; and details provided of a range of new initiatives to be provided by the library.

Discussion ensued on the library refurbishment which was due to commence in May; the use of Members to help raise awareness of services available; and Members gave their thanks to the library staff for their work during the pandemic.

Following a question in respect of the digital book offer Members were advised that digital books were a small proportion of the stock but acknowledged that book borrowing had changed and as such a new stock purchasing strategy was in development.

RESOLVED – That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to the Library Manager for her informative and interesting presentation.

CLS41 DARLINGTON HIPPODROME

The Head of Culture and Programming and Development Director gave a presentation (previously circulated) on the Darlington Hippodrome.

It was reported that the restoration process of the Civic Theatre, a Grade II listed landmark building built in 1907, began in 2010; that restoration and refurbishment was required to improve the theatre experience; and the key changes to the theatre were outlined.

Members were informed that the improvements to the Hippodrome, including the increased capacity, had attracted larger productions and a wider audience; increased the offer of function spaces, conference facilities and weddings; and it was reported that 2019/20 target of 13,000 for conference and hire had been exceeded at 21,000, highlighting a clear demand which would be developed further.

It was reported that there was now an increased level of creative learning and engagement, with education spaces and breakout rooms; a volunteering service had been developed; and Members were informed that all key performance indicators were met in 2019/20. Reference was also made to the Hullabaloo Theatre and its programme of events.

Details were provided of the impact of COVID-19 on the theatre. It was reported that donations were received from ticketholders; financial support provided from furlough scheme; and successful bids of £1M and £500k were made to the Art Council cultural recovery fund, which were being used to offset loss of ticket sale, sustain the theatre and retain jobs.

Reference was made to the online offer available to customers during the period of closure between March and September 2020; that going forward there would be a hybrid offer of online streamed events, live theatre, cinema offer and west end live encore screenings; and details provided of the measures in place to support the safe return of customers. In relation to ticket sales it was anticipated that sales would be at 75 per cent of normal ticket sales by March 2022.

Discussion ensued on the financial support during the pandemic; Members were advised that the furlough scheme was used initially for all Hippodrome staff; that the cultural recovery funds were time limited, with phase 1 funding spent between October and March 2021 and phase two to be spent between April and June 2021; and following a question on supplier contracts during the pandemic it was reported that whilst there had been some product wastage, many of the bigger suppliers had allowed contracts to be paused.

Following a question, Members were assured that any historical maintenance issues were addressed during the renovation and all site costs and income were reported; and in relation to the key performance indicators it was highlighted that digital engagement, education and outreach could be captured in the future.

RESOLVED – That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to the Head of Culture and Programming and Development Director for their informative and interesting presentation.

CLS42 WORK PROGRAMME

The Managing Director submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2020/21.

Members gave further consideration to the recommended performance indicators outlined in the Darlington Library presentation; requested an update report on the Northgate Initiative; and noted that the Work Programme would be reviewed at the next meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – (a) That the recommended performance indicators for the library service be agreed.

(b) That the current status of the Work Programme be noted.