

COUNCIL – MEETING CANCELLED 13 MAY 2021

OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

Indoor and Outdoor Market

2. Members welcomed an update from the Assistant Director Economic Growth and Managing Director, Market Asset Management (MAM), on the progress made to date on the redevelopment of the Indoor Market and an update on plans for the Outdoor Market.
3. Scrutiny were provided with details of the work undertaken to date as part of phase one of the redevelopment, noting that the roofing works have almost been completed. We were informed of slight delays due to the identification of asbestos on site.
4. We were provided with details of phase two of the development which was due to commence in May and were informed that as part of phase two traders will be assisted in applying for grants to refurbish their own stalls.
5. Discussion ensued in respect of the outdoor market and Members were assured that an outdoor market strategy detailing how stalls would be attracted to Darlington was in development and will be shared with Members. Scrutiny have requested details of occupancy levels to gauge the success of both the indoor market and outdoor market.
6. We raised concern in respect of the contract terms and conditions for potential street food traders, in particular the turnover rent. Members were assured 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. We also noted that the charges were in line with other food markets in the country.

Darlington Libraries

7. Members welcomed a PowerPoint presentation from the Library Manager on Darlington Libraries.
8. We were provided with details of the services provided by Darlington and Cockerton Library and were reminded of the refurbishment plans for Darlington Library, which will commence in May.
9. Members were informed that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the work on the digital offer available to residents, with online membership implemented at the beginning of the pandemic. We were pleased to note that 870 new members have

signed up since March 2020 and that there has been a large increase in digital borrowing, from 24,426 issues in 2019-2020 to 58,489 issues in 2020-2021.

10. Details were provided of the Library app which allows library members to self-manage their accounts and is helping to facilitate borrowing safely during the pandemic and we noted that the library home delivery service is delivering books to 280 households every month with the help of Darlington Support.
11. A number of proposed changes to the performance indicators were outlined. Members have agreed to the changes to the performance indicators for the library service.

Darlington Hippodrome

12. We also received a PowerPoint Presentation from the Head of Culture and Programming and Development Director on Darlington Hippodrome.
13. The presentation covered the key changes to the theatre as a result of the restoration and refurbishment process, all of which have enabled the theatre to attract larger productions and a wider audience, increased the offer of function spaces and conference facilities and increased levels of creative learning and engagement.
14. We noted the financial support available to the Hippodrome during the COVID-19 pandemic with donations received from ticketholders, financial support provided by the furlough scheme and successful bids of £1M and £500k made to the Art Council cultural recovery fund, which is being used to offset loss of ticket sale, sustain the theatre and retain jobs.
15. We were provided with details of the online offer that was available to customers during the period of closure between March and September 2020 and welcomed the plans for a hybrid offer of online streamed events, live theatre, cinema offer and West End live encore screenings going forward
16. Members welcomed the measures that have been put in place to support the safe return of customers and noted the anticipated ticket sales which are expected to be at 75 per cent of normal ticket sales by March 2022.

Work Programme 2020/21

17. We have given consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee for the Municipal Year 2020/21 and possible review topics, the work programme is a rolling work programme and items can be added as necessary.

Councillor Mike Renton
Chair of Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee