

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 JANUARY 2016

Present: Councillor J Dhindsa (Chair)
Councillors K Crout, K Hastrick, A Khan, R Martins, A Rindl,
L Topping and D Walford

Officers: Head of Community and Customer Services
Culture and Community Section Head
Museum and Heritage Manager
Museum Collections Officer
Mayor's Political Assistant
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

55 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

There was a change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Martins replaced Councillor Collett.

Apologies were received from Councillor Joynes.

56 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS (IF ANY)

There were no disclosures of interests.

57 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2015 were submitted and signed.

58 THE BIG EVENTS SERIES

The Scrutiny Committee received a report of the Culture and Play Section Head setting out an overview of the Big Events series. It included the lessons learnt from the previous year and how they had influenced the programme in year two; marketing information and analysis; footfall data and the involvement of local businesses.

The Culture and Play Section Head informed the Scrutiny Committee that the Big Events had been successful in increasing more footfall into the Town Centre. It also demonstrated the important role arts and culture could provide in helping to support the regeneration of the town. A short video was played and the

Culture and Play Section Head said that this illustrated one of the aims of the Big Event series, which was to create memories for people.

Councillor Martins commented that the events were fantastic, however he felt there had been a missed opportunity in relation to advertising. Those people visiting Intu were missing out on the events. There needed to be a more aggressive approach to advertising.

The Culture and Play Section Head advised that the street banners had started at the Lower High Street and provided increased visibility. The most effective advertising had been through social media. It was recognised that more work needed to take place with the new Business Improvement District (BID) and Intu.

The Head of Community and Customer Services added that social media had been important for publicising the events. He explained how Mumsnet had circulated positive messages about the Big Beach, encouraging people to go.

The Culture and Play Section Head said that the Council's Communications Team had provided exceptional support over the last year. The service had brought in people with really good social media experience and skills. There were many messages which had been retweeted on social media sites and the coverage was extensive. In the future people would be able to register their interest and they could then be sent direct social media messages relevant to their interests.

Councillor Hastrick advised that she had attended many of the events in her role as Chairman of Watford Borough Council. She had heard numerous people making positive comments and that they could not believe it was happening in Watford.

Councillor Rindl noted the reference to the Watford Metropolitan Line extension in the report. She felt that accessibility was important and that it would be a shame if the station on Cassiobury Park Avenue was to close.

The Chair acknowledged the Councillor's comments, but stated that two new stations were to be created.

In response to a question from Councillor Khan about sharing costs with local businesses, the Culture and Play Section Head advised that officers were very mindful of costs and the amount of funding currently available could not be guaranteed in future years. He had reviewed the tendering process and explained the approach used with the contractor for the ice rink. This had enabled the Council to cap the risk to itself. It would also receive a percentage of the income over and above a threshold. With regard to the BID, it was still at an early stage in its development. It needed to establish itself once it was formally in place from April. The Council would work collaboratively together with the BID in order for it to become more involved in the events.

Councillor Khan asked whether businesses outside of the Town Centre had been approached, for example Warner Brothers Studios might be a suitable sponsor for the Big Screen.

The Culture and Play Section Head agreed that sponsorship was an area that could be investigated further this year, however it did not guarantee continual funding. With the installation of the footfall counters it was now possible to provide businesses with details of the footfall flow during events. This potentially could help with attracting sponsors.

Following a question from Councillor Topping about the cost of £60,000 for the Big Skate, the Culture and Play Section Head explained that officers were waiting for the final report about this year's event. The information would be circulated to the Scrutiny Committee once it had been received. He was aware that attendance at rinks in Edinburgh and Nottingham were down by approximately 30% compared to the previous year. It was acknowledged that there had been exceptionally poor weather and adverse conditions for ice rinks this year. The ice rink in Colchester had closed early and the company been made bankrupt.

Councillor Topping commented that 2016 was the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death. She said he was an important cultural personality and it was key that he was commemorated.

The Culture and Play Section Head informed the Scrutiny Committee that the Cultural Leaders' Group had met in December and discussed this matter. It had been agreed to hold a Literary Festival and a huge amount of work was taking place to make it happen. It would be held during March and April throughout the town.

Councillor Topping added that there were various grants available for those holding events to commemorate Shakespeare.

Councillor Topping asked whether officers had considered the possibility of introducing road trains that could go up and down the High Street.

The Culture and Play Section Head responded that he had discussed land trains with the ice rink operator for 2016. The operator would be investigating this possibility.

Councillor Topping was concerned about the impact the events had on the New Watford Market. She felt that people were not turning into the market. In the lead up to Christmas she had noted there were 11 empty stalls within the market. She had noted the German market mainly sold food; there was only one different type of stall. She had seen German markets in other towns which sold a much wider variety of goods.

The Chair said that personally he had enjoyed the summer events. Residents had made comments to him. With regard to the German market, cost had been an issue. If the cost was too high the traders would not sell their produce. He

advised that he would speak to officers about an event the Sikh community would like to hold in the Town Centre to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Sikh Gurdwara in Lady's Close.

The Chair noted that the main report had been written for the Cultural Leaders' Group and asked who this included.

The Culture and Play Section Head advised that the Cultural Leaders' Group included representatives from Watford Borough Council, Watford Palace Theatre, West Herts College, Watford Football Club, the Arts Council, the Colosseum and the BBC.

The Chair mentioned the information about the audiences. He felt that more work needed to be done to encourage more participants from the Asian and Black communities. He suggested that leaflets could be produced or officers could speak at different venues, including the Sikh Gurdwara and the two Mosques.

Councillor Crout referred to the cuts to local government grants and asked how officers saw the financial future of the events. He was aware there had been talk of a music festival to be held in Cassiobury Park in 2017. He asked whether officers had spoken to local residents or the Friends of Cassiobury Park.

In response to Councillor Crout's first question, the Culture and Play Section Head explained that the aim was to minimise any costs and the contractor would bear any risks, but allowing them to operate with creativity within the space provided. This could include the extra stalls available, rides or other linked activities for visitors. Whilst ambitious the ideal situation would be that the Council incurred little or no cost, this may not be possible, however the Council was trying to minimize costs where appropriate through testing the market via a competitive tendering process. It was important to ensure quality and allow the operators the opportunity to explore more breadth of activities, maximising the space. Leadership team monitored the events programme and was aware of the Council's budget constraints.

The Head of Community and Customer Services informed the Scrutiny Committee that funding was in place for the next two or three years. The audience would increase as the activities continued. For example after the first Big Skate, people had asked if the ice rink would return the following year. This meant that the operator could be assured that people were interested and there would be an audience in the future.

Councillor Crout responded that the residents had been concerned when the lottery bid had been successful. They felt it was the next step to having a regular music festival in the park. They did not want it to become the next Isle of Wight festival.

The Culture and Play Section Head explained that it was too early to speak to residents and the Friends of Cassiobury Park about the details of a potential festival. Currently the discussions were about strategic matters, involving

organisations including the Police. When the time was right there were processes in place which would give residents an opportunity to provide feedback.

Councillor Hastrick noted the total attendance by disabled people. It was important to get the adverts to all parts of the community. It would be an idea to contact groups such as the Wheelchair Dance group or Mencap to see how they might get involved in events or find ways to encourage disabled people to participate.

Councillor Topping repeated her concern about the impact on the New Watford Market. She acknowledged that people were coming into the town for the events, but they were not visiting the market. The displays on the High Street and the external stalls stopped people going into the market.

The Culture and Play Section Head advised that some traders had been involved with some of the events during 2015 and had welcomed the opportunity.

Councillor Khan asked about the return of investment, considering the council had committed £180,000 each year.

The Head of Community and Customer Services explained that the funding in year one had been £180,000, the same for year two. In year three, 2016/17, the funding had been reduced to £95,000.

The Culture and Play Section Head added that the Council would be working with Herts Tourism and the BID to assess the effect on the local economy.

Councillor Khan stressed that it was important to consider if the events were worth the funding allocated to them. If not, then it was necessary to consider whether the Council should continue the events programme.

The Culture and Play Section Head responded that officers had baseline data for footfall and the average spend per person for the first year. In 2015/16 baseline data could be shown for where the visitors went to eat and drink. The aim was to get businesses more involved and show how their cash receipts could increase during events.

Councillor Martins cautioned that it was necessary to be conscious of the costs involved, but it was not always possible to put a monetary value on something. The opportunities for the growth in the local economy also needed to be factored in. The value of something did not have to only be about money. The social value of the events was equally important.

Councillor Martins agreed with the comments about the market and felt there had been a missed opportunity to draw people into it. Some events might be able to lead people in.

Councillor Martins then spoke about events in Cassiobury Park. He agreed that it was necessary to be aware of residents' views. Events in the Town Centre also had an impact on local residents. It was important to look at the bigger picture. In recognising residents' concerns it was also important to highlight the benefits events brought.

Councillor Rindl, who represented Park ward, felt sure that officers would work with residents and the ward councillors.

Councillor Crout commented that it was good to have a thriving economy and the events provided enjoyment to people, especially those on low incomes as many of the events were free. With reference to Cassiobury Park, he reminded Members that events had been held in the park for many years, but residents feared that in the future there would be too many.

Councillor Topping said that the regular road closures for events was a major concern for those residents affected.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions and the officers for their presentation. In finishing he said that overall the feedback appeared to be that they were worthwhile events.

RESOLVED –

that the report and presentation be noted.

59

WATFORD MUSEUM SERVICE AND HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND PROJECT

The Scrutiny Committee received a report of the Museum and Heritage Manager. Prior to the start of the meeting, Councillors were given a tour of the Museum and informed about some of the collections on display, which showed some of Watford's heritage.

The Museum and Heritage Manager provided the Scrutiny Committee with some background information about the Museum, including the building, the number of items within the collection and details of the staffing and volunteer arrangements. She advised that there were two key performance indicators which were monitored –

- the number of visitors to the Museum, including school and group visits
- the number of school children visiting the museum

The Museum and Heritage Manager explained the Museum's objectives –

1 Delivery of Arts Council and VAQAS Accredited Museum and Tourist Attraction

The accreditation scheme covered the governance of the Museum, sustainability, the business plan, duty of care to the town, the audience and the collections. The Museum had recently been awarded a tourism rosette. A code of ethics was required as not all donations could be accepted. If a museum lost its accreditation, this was a significant matter and would often be a national news story.

2 Collections care and development

A collection policy was necessary and set out the requirements for any items to be included in the collections. Items needed to have a connection to Watford. It was important to take into consideration the temperature of rooms and the display cabinets, the surrounding humidity, the vibrations internally and externally affecting the building and the control of pests. Staff continually received refresher training.

3 Raising the profile of the Museum Service

The Museum would soon have its own social media links. This would help to promote the Museum to a wider audience. A programme of activities and events was created, some of which took place at the Museum but also in other locations. The Museum had participated in events across the town.

4 Partnership working and audience development

A list of the Museum's partners was provided to the Scrutiny Committee. The latest partner was 'May contain nuts'. The wide variety of partners showed the range and diversity of work the Museum was involved in. The work also included co-ordinating the Heritage Open Day scheme in Watford. The team had worked with Planning Policy on the restoration of the tombs at St Mary's.

5 Learning and outreach

The team would be involved in the forthcoming Big Wordfest, which included an event at the Museum about Roald Dahl.

6. Staff and volunteer development

The staff and volunteers were provided with ongoing training opportunities.

The Museum and Heritage Manager then explained about the Heritage Lottery Fund Project, entitled – 'Re-engaging with Watford's past'. She showed initial designs of the possible redevelopment. It was necessary to be mindful of the listed status of the building. The development would provide opportunities for a

new visitor entrance, new galleries which would improve the display of the collections. It would help the service to improve its reach to a different audience.

Following a comment from Councillor Rindl about audio guides, the Museum and Heritage Manager agreed that this was a possibility. The team was collecting records of individuals' memories of Watford and capturing the sounds of the town.

The scheme would help improve accessibility to the public and better storage facilities. There would be a dedicated learning space with appropriate facilities, including washing and toilet facilities.

The Museum and Heritage Manager emphasised that in order to justify any funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund it was necessary to show that the service was looking forward and making the best of use of funds. The scheme was at an early stage. Discussions had taken place with Historic England about the redevelopment. It was proposed that the side development, which would replace the later addition to the original building, would include a level access direct from the front of the building, rather than the current arrangement at the rear.

The Museum and Heritage Manager set out the time line for the development and the stages that had to be met. If all development stages were successful, it was anticipated that work might start in 2017. The work could then take in the region of 18 months. She stressed that this was a long term project.

Councillor Crout asked whether the Council had committed to the scheme and identified funding for the project. In addition he asked if the redevelopment would lead to an increase in the number of hours the Museum was open.

The Museum and Heritage Manager advised that the Council was committed to the redevelopment and funding was available in the Capital budget. It had been ring fenced to cover items such as boilers and lighting. The Head of Community and Customer Services had also secured additional funding. The Council would be contributing approximately 20% of the costs for the development phase.

The Head of Community and Customer Services confirmed that provision had been made in the budget to contribute towards the match-funding commitment.

In response to Councillor Crout's second question, the Museum and Heritage Manager explained that the hours of operation would be reviewed and how the service was delivered. In the future it may be possible to provide more opening hours or to open only part of the building. Further research would be carried out during the development phase.

Councillor Khan commented that the Museum did spectacular work. He asked whether the proposed changes would improve the effectiveness of the Museum. He had noted the number of school children visiting the Museum, but there were many more children within the Borough.

The Museum and Heritage Manager explained that the indicator related to school children referred to those who visited the Museum as part of an organised school visit. It did not include those children who came as part of a family. The current building did not provide a dedicated space for schools, but it was hoped that the redevelopment would include a specific area or room, which would help increase the facilities for school visits.

Councillor Khan asked whether the Museum linked its exhibitions to the current school curriculum.

The Museum and Heritage Manager advised that the Museum did recognise the curriculum and this was being developed further. With the introduction of the new curriculum teachers were regularly looking outside of the school environment for more information on local history.

The Museum and Heritage Manager showed Councillors some of the recent acquisitions to the Museum's collection. The items had been acquired at no cost to the service.

The Head of Community and Customer Services informed the Scrutiny Committee that the Museum had worked with the Watford based film makers who had recently won an award at the London Short Film Festival. He added that the Museum and Heritage Manager had given an excellent presentation at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.

The Chair thanked the Museum and Heritage Manager and her team for the great work they did in Watford and with its diverse community. He also thanked her for the excellent tour she had provided prior to the start of the meeting.

RESOLVED –

that the report and presentation be noted.

60

OUTSTANDING ACTIONS AND QUESTIONS UPDATE

The Scrutiny Committee received a list of outstanding actions and questions. Members noted the updates.

Councillor Rindl noted that PI 39 had been removed following the last meeting and asked for an explanation.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer explained that following the meeting in November it was felt that this action had been completed. The early reference to complaints about Revenues and Benefits had been superseded due to the services improved performance. At the March meeting Overview and Scrutiny Committee would receive the latest performance information. If Members still felt there was a concern about complaints a new action could be added.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

61 **EXECUTIVE DECISION PROGRESS REPORT**

The Scrutiny Committee received the latest edition of the Executive Decision Progress Report 2015/16.

Councillor Khan noted that the decision on Leggatts Campus had been made in November. He asked to see the report which had been presented to the Portfolio Holder in making his decision.

Following a question from Councillor Rindl about the Skillmakers report, the Committee and Scrutiny Officer explained that the report was due to be presented to Cabinet in February. All Councillors would be notified when the agenda had been published and was available online.

RESOLVED –

that the report be noted.

62 **HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Councillor Kareen Hastrick, the Council's appointed representative to the Health Scrutiny Committee, informed Members that the Scrutiny Committee had met earlier that day. They had been informed about the transportation of people to hospital. She would ensure that the report related to West Herts was circulated to all Watford Councillors. In addition the Scrutiny Committee had received a report from the East of England Ambulance service, which was on a par with the rest of the country. However, it was still not good. This report would also be made available to Councillors.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted and reports circulated as available.

63 **BUDGET PANEL**

Councillor Khan, Chair of Budget Panel, stated that the minutes had been published for the last two meetings and were available online.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer advised that the Panel had made a recommendation to Cabinet about the increase in burial fees. Prior to the meeting the Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services had reviewed the

original recommendation and submitted amendments to Cabinet which were agreed.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

64 **OUTSOURCED SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL**

Councillor Crout, Chair of the Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel, informed the Scrutiny Committee that the Panel had met on Tuesday at Watford Leisure Centre Woodside when it had reviewed SLM.

The Chair added that he had also been at the meeting and had asked for further information on the ethnic make up of the staff.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

65 **COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP TASK GROUP**

In the absence of Councillor S Williams, Chair of the Community Safety Partnership Task Group, Councillor Martins reported that the Task Group had had a good dialogue with a door supervisor and a representative from Pubwatch. The overall impression was that the town was safe. There had also been a presentation from the Fire service. The officer had said that the service was keen to do more work with the community.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

66 **MANAGEMENT OF CONSERVATION AREAS TASK GROUP**

Councillors Martins, the Chair of the Task Group, informed Councillors that the Task Group had to date spoken with officers on the procedures and management of conservation areas. The next step, taking place on Tuesday 26 January, was to meet residents and listen to their views.

The Chair asked that all Councillors be provided with a copy of the poster that had been given to those Councillors with a conservation area within their ward.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer explained that the posters had been given to those who had a conservation area in their ward in order to promote the session on 26 January and the online survey. A smaller version of the poster had been delivered to all households.

In response to a question from the Chair, Councillor Martins responded that the issue of funding in conservation areas was not part of the Task Group's role. It was currently looking at the management of the areas.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

67

DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

- Thursday 4 February 2016 (For call-in only)
- Thursday 25 February 2016 (For call-in only)
- Thursday 3 March 2016

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.30 pm
and finished at 9.35 pm