

Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee

A meeting of Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee was held on Wednesday, 21st January, 2009.

Present: Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell(Chairman), Cllr Andrew Sherris(Vice-Chairman), Cllr Dick Cains, Cllr Alan Lewis, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Mick Womphrey

Officers: J. Palmer, N. Russell (CESC), P. Mennear, M. Jones, C. Lunn (LD)

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Hilary Aggio, Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Mrs Kath Nelson

1 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2 Minutes of the Meeting Held on 8th December 2008

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 8th December 2008

CONCLUDED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8th December 2008 be agreed as a correct record.

3 Monitoring of Previously Agreed Recommendations

Consideration was given to Progress Updates on the Review of Preston Hall and Park, and Review of Festivals.

The recommendations from the Review of Preston Hall and Park had been fully implemented within the specified timescales. Members discussed the progress made, and further detailed information was requested for members information. Members agreed the assessments of progress contained in the report.

The progress of the Review of Festivals, was discussed and it was noted that some actions relating to the Market were still on-going.

CONCLUDED that progress so far be agreed and that further updates on progress on the actions from the review of Festivals be received as appropriate.

4 Review of Tees Active

Members received evidence from J. Palmer, Service Manager (Looked After Children), and N. Russell as part of their review of Tees Active.

J. Palmer explained that Stockton Borough Council had approximately 230 looked after children. The majority were placed in Stockton with Local Authority foster carers, there were three Children's Homes in the Borough which provided 12 placements, and approximately 49 children were living outside the Borough. There was a further respite home for children with complex needs, which offered overnight and weekend breaks to support families. Also, due to an increased number of looked after children over the previous 18 months,

placements had been purchased from independent fostering agencies and private residential homes, which were usually outside the Borough.

It was noted that the Local Authority had a corporate duty under the Care Leavers Act to continue to support young people once they had left care up to the age of 21, and beyond if they accessed higher education.

Tees Active, as part of the every child matters agenda, had been offering free use of leisure facilities for looked after children and care leavers. Reduced rates were also offered to Local Authority foster carers and their families. The scheme had been an integral part of the Council's corporate parenting agenda. The leisure saver card allowed young people free access to:

- SPLASH
- Billingham Forum
- Thornaby Pavilion
- Thornaby Pool
- and Stockton Sports Centre before it closed

It was noted that there were several areas for development. These were:

- When a child or young person became looked after, they or their carers automatically received an application form for membership. Take up had been slow, particularly the renewal of cards after a year.
- Stockton had three Children's Homes and all twelve young people who lived there had access to the scheme. Take up generally, however had been relatively low. A small number of foster carers had memberships and it was considered that it may have been timely to re-launch the scheme to ensure maximum use.
- There were a number of Local Authorities across the region who run similar schemes and had rolled this out further to include free access to other facilities such as Beamish and discounted or free admission at theatres or local events, however not all authorities in the Tees Valley itself operated a similar service.
- Group activities were not covered at present although it had been possible to negotiate on an individual basis a reduction for 5 a side, and individual activities such as squash or badminton were not currently included.

Currently it was only those children who lived in the Borough and were the responsibility of Stockton Council who had access to the scheme, whereas other children may actually live in the Borough but were not the responsibility of Stockton's social services and so did not qualify.

Members queried why some carers had not taken up the scheme. J. Palmer informed Members that some foster parents were aware of the scheme but did not tend to apply for the scheme as they have other young children and had a number of pressures on their time, whereas others had simply forgotten it was available. In order to overcome this, social workers had been asked to remind their clients about the scheme, and it would also be covered at future Foster Carers support group meetings.

Members also queried if Tees Active staff were promoting the scheme in conjunction with CESC. J. Palmer informed that due to confidentiality and Data Protection issues, it was far easier for CESC to solely manage it. However, there was scope to develop this in the future, perhaps by having Tees Active staff promote the scheme at Foster Care support group meetings.

The possibility of running a 'buddy service' at the Leisure Centres was raised. J. Palmer explained that because of the needs and issues of looked after children it was better to work with this group of people on an individual basis. The service employed two full-time mentors to help achieve this. As the scheme was about empowering young people and developing a sense of trust in others, potential to propel this in the future with an increased number of youth workers was possible.

J. Palmer also informed that the Tees Active scheme was only a small part of the leisure services available to looked after children, and others include those related to libraries and discounted admission to museums and attractions. Members asked for further information regarding these additional activities.

N. Russell presented the results of the benchmarking exercise. It was highlighted that:

- 9 Local Authorities were asked to take part in the exercise,
- 5 agreed to take part, and
- 2 responses had been received.

Following accumulation of the data, which investigated such areas as schemes to support talented sportsmen, disability support, faith support, external sources of funding, and customer satisfaction, a report comparing the leisure facilities in the North [deleted] would be completed and presented to the Committee.

The Scrutiny Officer distributed the following information:

- Results of MORI 2008 survey,
- The results of a 2008 Viewpoint survey that examined sports development
- National research regarding Leisure Trusts and the Local Authority leisure market.

Members discussed the findings of the research. The topic of free swimming was raised and members queried if those over the age of 60 who paid for an annual gym and swimming membership would be entitled to a refund in April 2009 when swimming becomes free for that age group. N. Russell informed that this was currently being addressed.

Members also queried the opening hours of the leisure centres. Members were informed that opening hours would be provided to the Committee, and the possibility of placing these in local publications was discussed.

CONCLUDED that the information be noted.

5 Work Programme

Consideration was given to the scope and project plan. All the evidence that

had been received during the review was discussed, ahead of the next meeting of the committee which was scheduled to be used to draft recommendations.

CONCLUDED that the Scope and Project Plan be noted.