

Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee

A meeting of Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee was held on Monday, 11th January, 2010.

Present: Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell (Chair), Cllr Hilary Aggio, Cllr Dick Cains, Cllr Aidan Cockerill (Vice Councillor Sherris), Cllr Alan Lewis, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Mick Womphrey,

Officers: R Kench (CESC); G Clingan (DNS); Mrs T Harrison, P Mennear (LD)

Also in attendance: Cllr Mrs Mary Womphrey (Cabinet Member)

Apologies: Cllr Andrew Sherris (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Ken Dixon, Mrs Kath Nelson

1 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **Draft Minutes of the Arts, Leisure & Culture Select Committee held on 18th November 2009**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 18th November 2009.

CONCLUDED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18th November 2009 be agreed as a true record.

3 **Overview Meeting for Arts, Leisure & Cultural Services-Presentation**

Members received a presentation in relation to the performance of Arts, Leisure and Cultural Services and Direct Services within the Borough. The presentation advised on the things that went well, not so well and emerging issues in the following services:

- Arts Development
- Libraries & Information
- Museums
- Leisure & Sports Development
- Countryside, Parks and Greenspace

It was noted that the ARC had a very good 2009, and had seen an increase in both programming and usage.

Members requested that all Members received a report providing information on the success of the Stockton International Riverside Festival and Arc including the statistics which corroborated the findings to enable them to respond to requests from residents.

Car parking for the Arc was discussed but it was observed that the locality and amount of parking was good.

It was acknowledged that SIRF 2009 was shorter and had fewer large productions than previous years due to increased costs and other financial pressures. By comparison, other festivals had grown due to increased

spending by their host authorities, and use of grants.

Members were advised that efforts were being made to improve the numbers using the Town Centre, through initiatives such as the autumn film festival, Festafall.

Members discussed the success of the new Thornaby Library and the planned improvements which had been delayed for Stockton Central Library.

Members were advised on the improvements being made at Preston Hall Museum and Park, including the capital works. Members noted that the Council had been unable to secure major funds for the park element of the improvement strategy, but some improvement works were underway including drainage to the main field.

Members queried the possibility of catering for the weddings taking place at Preston Hall and were advised that changes were being made that would enable wedding receptions to be held at Preston Hall with in-house catering.

Members were advised of the leisure and sports development activities which had proved to be successful.

It was observed that considering the financial climate, the Borough of Stockton were very fortunate to have as many refurbishments take place. Members noted that the capital works led to financial pressures to fund borrowing and ongoing revenue commitments.

Members were advised that it was planned to hold a water/river based extreme sports race which would have television coverage.

Members discussed the costs of the annual November fireworks, and it was noted that all aspects of events would be reviewed as part of a new approach to events, and the Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation programme.

Members queried whether funds existed to support local elite athletes, however Members were advised that local authorities did not have policies to support individuals as it was preferred to support the community as a whole.

Members queried the input that was given to the Billingham Folklore Festival and were advised that Stockton Borough Council provided some funding and advice for the festival; however it was run by an independent company who reserved the right to operate the festival as they saw fit.

Countryside, Parks & Greenspace

Members were advised that a number of consultation activities had taken place including drop in sessions, so people could say what they thought of green spaces. The compiled responses from all the activities would be fed back to Members in due course.

Upon completing a very detailed submission, six parks within the Borough were awarded with Green Flag status which was a great achievement. Stockton Borough Council also won the Best City in Britain in Bloom Award for 2009.

Members were advised of the on-going delivery of outdoor play spaces and the park regeneration programme.

The officer advised that 58 local Wildlife (and, Geodiversity) Sites had been identified across the Borough, in accordance with new national guidance from DEFRA.

Members were reminded that the River User Group had been established to provide a more integrated approach to the managements of the River Tees and promote its use for recreation and enjoyment. Also Stockton River Corridors Project had been established.

Members were advised that 60% of people surveyed in the Ipsos MORI survey had advised that they were satisfied with the parks and open space. 77% of park or greenspace users were also satisfied following results from the GreenSTAT survey.

Members were advised that the difficulties encountered were:

- Tight time frames in relation to design and delivery of the Spaces for Play programme. The added challenge here was to ensure schemes were subject to detailed local consultation and were innovative. Recent bad weather was also having an impact on delivery e.g. installation of new equipment at Wynyard Woodland Park.

- Work to demonstrate compliance with the Biodiversity Duty under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

- Delivery of Tees Valley Green Infrastructure - due to lack of any significant funding from, One North East to support delivery, and the need to complete the economic business case which ONE have requested.

- Revising the Play Strategy

Emerging Issues included to the ability to secure capital funds to support project delivery, the need to finalise the Action Plan for the Borough's Green Infrastructure Strategy, the role of greenspace in mitigating flood risk and contributing to climate change adaptation, the development of allotments, and tree/woodland strategies and meeting Biodiversity targets. Securing increased revenue funding to manage and maintain completed projects is a key issue.

Members queried whether the Community Pay Back schemes were utilised to improve parks and were advised that people on the scheme had been brought in to work at Thornaby allotments. Meanwhile inmates at Kirklevington Prison had been constructing fencing for the play area at John Whitehead Park.

Members were advised that some money could be saved in some areas as a result of biodiversity, but it was emphasised that 'wild' areas also require active management. Each year officers looked at new capital schemes as ways to create more multi functional areas that would create wider benefits.

Discussion took place on the possibility of future proofing all future projects in

relation to securing their future funding arrangements. Members were advised that Stockton Borough Council tried to do this but it was difficult. For example, supplementary planning guidance on planning obligations makes provision for this but this needs to be balanced against the need to ensure schemes remain affordable for developers.

Discussion took place regarding charging for entry to parks, however it was considered that this would probably not be feasible, would go against tradition in this country and may go against covenants relating to the use of particular pieces of land.

Members noted the improvements that had taken place since the introduction of the strategic approach to countryside and parks management, and wished the Committee's thanks to be passed onto the team.

CONCLUDED that:

1. The report be noted.
2. The Head of Arts and Culture will provide Members with a report outlining the impact of the Stockton International Riverside Festival and Arc including statistics that corroborated the information provided at the meeting.