

People Select Committee

Overview Meeting 2018

Monday 26th February 2018

Culture, Leisure and Events

Context

Members are well aware that as a Council we have had to adapt to funding reductions of £68 million over the last seven years and that we are still confronted with having to find further savings.

Whilst we acknowledge that we have a strong track record of sound financial management and we have been dealing with these problems successfully for many years, it will not be easy to address the additional loss of government funding of over £6 million by 2019/20. Moving forward, expectations will need to be realistic as many more difficult decisions will need to be made.

The challenge for all Members is to ensure that decisions about the basis on which services will be delivered are within the resources available, taking account of a number of factors such as reduced budget allocation, changing demographics, increasing demand, new national legislation and policy direction. Members are reminded of the four policy principles that support our decision-making:

- **Protecting the vulnerable through targeted intervention**, particularly those people in our communities who are subject to, or at risk of harm, people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and those who are financially excluded or whose circumstances make them vulnerable.
- **Promoting equality of opportunity through targeted intervention**, specifically in relation to tackling health inequalities, meeting the skills gap and improving access to job opportunities, tackling fuel poverty, improving education and training opportunities, access to affordable housing and financial and digital inclusion.
- **Developing strong and healthy communities** through the provision of mainstream and preventive services that are available to all those who choose to access them.
- **Creating economic prosperity** across the Borough

It is within this context that the Select Committee is invited to undertake their overview duties.

Performance Reporting

Performance across the Council Plan was reported on a six-monthly basis. This was reported to Executive Scrutiny Committee in September 2017 and January 2018, and then forwarded to members of each Select Committee with key issues highlighted by the Chair at their next meeting.

Culture, Leisure and Events – Director – Reuben Kench

Services include:

- Events
- Leisure & Sports Development
- Libraries & Information Services
- Museums
- Learning & Skills
- Customer Services

Council Plan 2017-18 – Arts, Leisure and Culture Theme

The Council Plan sets out the aims and objectives for all services and is refreshed on an annual basis.

The 2017-18 objectives for the Arts, Leisure and Culture theme are attached at Appendix 1.

Emerging Issues

Service delivery is influenced by a range of internal and external factors that develop over time. Emerging challenges and opportunities across Culture, Leisure and Events are summarised as follows:

- Events are a growing part of our efforts to attract people into our towns. The number of events planned for 2018 has shown a significant increase from 2017. Current listings show over 90 events being delivered or supported by the Council, with an increasing number of event proposals coming from commercial organisations and community groups who have limited event management experience/knowledge. The Event Service are stretched and will not be able to provide levels of support that have been possible in the past. The need to provide independent expert scrutiny and challenge to event safety plans is also a growing burden on our staff and our emergency service partners. We are reviewing how we support and deliver the current event programme whilst maintaining a robust Independent Safety Advisory Group (ISAG).
- Work to plan ‘city scale’ events across the Tees Valley to support our place promotion agenda represents a significant challenge where the capacity and experience in neighbouring Authorities is not as great as our own. We are currently collaborating on major initiatives likely to attract many tens of thousands of visitors and reach international television audiences. We are also leading arts projects linking communities together across the Tees Valley, such as the 3 year Greater Tees project for which £1.35m was secured in 2017.

Overview Report

- Preparations for the celebration of the bi-centenary of passenger rail in 2025 are already generating a significant workload, reflecting the huge potential of the anniversary event for this globally significant invention. In addition, preparations for the development of a UK City of Culture bid for the same year are under way and will need to engage and harness the involvement of many thousands of local people in the coming 12-24 months.
- Leisure and Sports Development are working closely with Public Health colleagues and our strategic leisure facility management partner Tees Active to increase the number of our residents who participate in active leisure. In particular we are targeting communities with the greatest health needs with promotions and programmes that enjoy the highest levels of subsidy, whilst making a general level of provision available to all.
- The capital programme to create the new leisure centre, library and customer services point in Ingleby Barwick is being managed by Technical Service colleagues, but as the client we are working hard to ensure it is fit for purpose and that those staff teams who move in can deliver a first class customer experience from the outset.
- Billingham Forum Theatre is a great venue with a popular programme, but the seating and carpets are in need of repair. We are exploring what can be achieved within the constraints of the building's listed status and limited available resources. It is hoped that we can make a significant and visible improvement this year.
- The Library Service will open two new 'Innovation' spaces at Thornaby Central and Stockton Central Libraries and will be working with community partners to introduce new audiences to digital and immersive library experiences. The reopening of the reconfigured Fairfield Branch presents a significant challenge as we try to serve the very active community of library users in less space and fewer opening hours. The need to make further savings in Libraries may well require other changes during the course of the year. However, unlike the majority of local authority library services, we retain a professionally staffed service providing supported access to an up-to-date book stock and an exciting and diverse range of reading and writing related events.
- Preston Park Museum & Grounds priority is to develop a more cohesive and quality visitor experience. The site is currently very popular but has the potential to become an even greater regional visitor attraction, reaching a wider tourism market. In order to achieve this, facilities and infrastructure improvements are essential. Better management of cars on the site will enable growth, through increased ability to host events. Improved signage, systems to prevent anti-social behaviour, and a clear brand identity will also strengthen the quality of the experience. Extension and improvements of the café and toilet facilities will extend dwell time and increase spend per head. We are also looking to harness a greater contribution from volunteers across the site.
- Tees Valley Museum Group (TVMG). Stockton Council secured 3 years of Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) funding from April 2018 to lead on the development of a collaborative programme of exhibitions, collections interpretation, marketing and access improvements for the 5 Tees Valley Museums Services. Having been awarded only 50% of the original grant sought, there is a challenge to meet the Arts Councils objectives and match the expectations of our partners and visitors. The next 3 years will be critical to establishing the TVMG as an ongoing revenue funded group. If we achieve our ambitious plans we could secure in excess of £2m in the next NPO round.
- The Learning & Skills Service has a key role to play in increasing the employability of our residents and helping to address the workforce development needs of local businesses.

Overview Report

It is responding to a drive for more apprenticeships and seeking to deliver a growing programme of employer based learning in a competitive environment. In addition, we continue to provide people with their first steps toward formal qualifications and higher education with entry level training and learner support.

- An Ofsted Inspection of the service is imminent and we believe we can retain our 'good' rating.
- On behalf of the whole Council, we are working on the design and provision of high quality Customer Services delivered through a set of efficient and effective customer access channels supported by a set of strong, consistent service standards that are compliant with Customer Service Excellence. As we route increasing numbers of services through our Customer Service front line, the challenge is to reduce costs without increasing queuing or waiting times. The primary means of improving efficiency is through automated on-line systems. There are significant technical challenges and there is the potential for customers to resist our attempts to automate, preferring to speak in person to our staff.

Potential Areas for In-Depth Review

Members are reminded that topics are being sought for the Scrutiny Work Programme 2018-19. Using the information provided as part of the performance updates and this Overview meeting, the Committee is invited to identify potential topics for review within this theme.

Potential topics will be considered at Executive Scrutiny Committee on 27 March.

The challenge of 'channel shift' and digital optimisation has previously been identified as a subject for an in-depth review.

Appendix 1

Council Plan 2017-18 – Arts, Leisure and Culture Theme

Our vision is of a borough where our heritage, festivals, cultural activities and leisure facilities help us attract visitors, investment and talent, where our events are central to creating vibrant town centres and where sport and active leisure opportunities help people sustain healthier lifestyles and support their wellbeing.

Key objectives and activities:

- Objective: **Deliver sustainable events and attractions that contribute to the delivery of vibrant and economically successful town centres and economic prosperity**
- Objective: **Deliver an effective library service that supports literacy, access to knowledge and inspiring activities for everyone in safe accessible spaces across the Borough**
- Objective: **Support all sectors of our communities to secure enjoyment, learning and achievement through sport and active leisure**