

Overview Report

People Select Committee

Overview Meeting 2020

2 March 2020

Arts, Culture and Leisure

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 future funding is uncertain.

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 the uncertain financial position, changing demographics, increasing demand, new national legislation and policy direction. Members are reminded of the four policy principles that support our decision-making:

- **Protect the vulnerable by**
 - protecting people who are subject to or at risk of harm
 - helping people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless
 - supporting people who are financially excluded
 - assisting people whose circumstances make them vulnerable

- **Create economic prosperity by**
 - ensuring the businesses and people of Stockton-on-Tees are part of a thriving and productive Tees Valley economy

- **Tackle inequality through improving**
 - health
 - job opportunities, skills and training
 - educational attainment for all
 - affordable housing and fuel poverty
 - financial inclusion

- **Help people to be healthier by**
 - providing mainstream services that are available where needed
 - providing preventative services that are available where needed

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 July and November 2019, and then forwarded to members of each Select Committee with key issues highlighted by the Chair at their next meeting.

Culture, Leisure and Events –

Overview Report

Director – Reuben Kench

Services include:

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

Council Plan 2019-2022 – Arts, Culture and Leisure

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

The 2019-22 objectives for the Arts, Culture and Leisure 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

As we encourage and support organisations wishing to develop new events across the Borough we increase the demand placed on our technical support teams and also on our Independent Safety Advisory Group (ISAG). This pressure is combined with a skill shortage in the technical event production field which have resulted in repeated failed attempts to recruit to key vacancies. There is also a related issue associated with the oversight of public events that are on private land. In this situation we don't have the landowner liabilities but we do still need to discharge our general duty of care.

Leisure & Sports Development

The majority of our leisure resources are invested in Tees Active, with whom we work closely in the development of their leisure programmes and the renewal of their facilities. The completion and opening of the new Ingleby Barwick leisure centre will necessitate new procedures and operational routines as staff deal with teething issues and relationships with new customers. The facility will combine a new library and information point which will also need to be operationally integrated.

Playing pitches and their related facilities present some significant demands and challenges. Artificial playing surfaces are becoming more widely accepted for football, rugby and hockey. These pitches can be used more intensively than grass, allowing several teams to use the same site and making the provision of changing facilities, club houses, lighting and car parking more efficient. Whilst there is potential for further investment from the Football Foundation, Rugby Football Union and Sport England, the resistance of clubs to ground sharing is an obstacle. However, the changing climate has resulted in so many fixture cancellations across all outdoor sports that the change of behaviours may become more acceptable.

Libraries

As mentioned above, the establishment of the new library within the IB Leisure facility, and the withdrawal from the branch within All Saints School, will generate considerable work for

Overview Report

the service staff. However, there is great excitement about what will be a much improved library for the Ingleby Barwick community.

Behind the scenes the service will be procuring and moving to a new Library Management System (LMS) in 2020/21. The LMS enables the management and tracking of the many thousands of items of stock and the relationship with tens of thousands of borrowers. The LMS also enables automation and self-serve and underpins every aspect of the service.

Museums

There are two distinct areas of museums work; the management and promotion of Preston Park Museum & Grounds (PPMG) and our collection, and the management of the Tees Valley Museum Group (TVMG).

Preston Park is tremendously popular and well used. At peak times demand for car parking cannot be fully accommodated. The café block is not suited to the needs of its users and the toilets are a source of constant customer criticism. However, repeated attempts to access grant funding for the park have failed. Modest investment is planned this year to refresh existing facilities and repair damage caused by vandalism, but a longer term solution is required.

TVMG is a consortium of the 5 museum services of the Tees Valley, Stockton is the lead authority. TVMG receives over £300,000 per annum from Arts Council England for a programme of education and interpretation, exhibition support, audience development and staff training. We are approaching the final year of the current funding agreement and the challenge of forming a shared set of ambitions for the next 4 year bid is considerable.

Learning & Skills

Providing skills and qualifications to adults within the Borough makes an important social and economic contribution. The service is fully externally funded and must constantly work to balance the demands of Ofsted with the costs of delivery and the funding that is provided from the Education and Skills Funding Agency. The new inspection framework for adult education is driving revised approaches to teaching and assessing. The service was rated 'good' at its last inspection in 2018.

Customer Services

External evaluation of our customer focus and the quality of our commitment to customers shows that we are amongst the very best. However, we know that we need to drive toward increasing self-service and end-to-end automation. To make this possible we are strengthening the technology at our disposal and our ability to use it. The digital optimisation plan is detailed and was developed through a recent scrutiny review. This work will accelerate this year as we procure and begin to work with a new low-code platform and a new website.

Potential Areas for In-Depth Review

Members are reminded that topics are being sought for the Scrutiny Work Programme 2020-21. 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 24 March.

The oversight of public events that are not on Council land is highlighted in the Events section above as a possible area of concern. This might benefit from a Scrutiny Review, though it would be largely technical, looking at legal obligations and jurisdictions, and might not require an in-depth review.

Overview Report

Appendix 1

Council Plan 2019-22 – Arts, Culture and Leisure

Our vision is of a Borough where our heritage, festivals, cultural activities and leisure facilities help us attract visitors and investment, and where sport and active leisure opportunities help people sustain healthier lifestyles.

Key objectives:

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