

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in The Studio, Gala Theatre, Durham City on **Monday 28 January 2019** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor E Adam (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors O Milburn, D Bell, R Crute, S Dunn, P Howell, P Jopling, R Manchester, C Martin and J Turnbull

Co-opted Members:

Mr T Bolton and Mrs P Holding

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B Avery, L Brown, J Clark, D Hicks, C Kay, A Patterson, A Simpson, P Sexton and M Wilson.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor J Turnbull substituted for Councillor A Patterson.

3 Minutes

16 November 2018 – Fuel Poverty

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised Members that in relation to the Fuel Poverty item included in the minutes a letter was sent, as members had agreed, to the Action Poverty Steering Group (APSG) in support of the Managing Money Better Service and reported that the APSG had agreed to fund the service for 2019/20.

The Minutes of the meetings held on 12 and 16 November 2018 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

4 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Howell declared an interest in the Gala Theatre Overview as his brother is the Head of Culture and Sport Services.

5 Any Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

There were no items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties.

6 Media Relations

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer referred Members to recent press articles that fall within the remit of Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The articles were:

- County Durham trees part of UK database to conserve the country's woodland – Seeds from some of County Durham's trees have been collected as part of a national programme to create a database of UK tree species. A team from the Royal Botanic Gardens were in County Durham to collect the seeds, which will be banked in its underground vaults, which can be used in conservation work to protect UK woodlands from pests and diseases.
- How town centre will look after £6m plus flood prevention work – The scheme at Chester-le-Street will start later this month. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government have approved £2.79 million in funding from the European Regional Development Fund for the project. Durham County Council had already committed up to £1.5 million to the scheme with the remainder of cash coming from the Environment Agency which is contributing £1.9 million. The project would see the 90m stretch of the Cong Burn which runs underneath the town's Market Place open up. As well as reducing the risk of flooding it is hoped that the move would see the watercourse transformed into an attractive landscape.

Resolved: That the presentation be noted.

7 Gala Theatre

The Committee considered the Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services and the Director of Transformation and Partnerships that provided Members with background information that gave an overview of the Gala Theatre (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Mr S Howell, Head of Culture and Sport was in attendance to present the report and gave a presentation (for copy of slides, see file of minutes). Members were given information on the seating capacity for the theatre and how this impacted as a constraint on some presented work from touring theatre companies that require a seating capacity of 1000. The advantages of home productions were highlighted as 100% of the box office was retained. The theatre was hired out to the university, schools and amateur dramatic companies.

The Gala operates a successful stage school that provides opportunities for children aged 5 to 19 years in all aspects of dramatic arts. The Gala's swing band plays in venues throughout the county.

The pressures on the Gala were seen as emerging competition, audience trends, investment requirements, rising base costs and the impact of austerity. Challenges to the

Gala were in both the short and medium term such as moving the café; refurbishment of the toilets and audience development work. Members were advised of the Gala Improvement Group that address operational trends in income and expenditure to reduce cost and increase secondary spend.

The focus of the Gala programme is on maximising presented productions and ensuring they work harder both through better financial deals, bigger audiences and stronger marketing support. The cinema is lucrative and considerations were being made on options regarding the cinema – for example should the cinema remain to attract a niche audience such as student population or could the cinema space be used for an alternative option for example additional rehearsal space.

Councillor Jopling asked if the theatre was constrained by its seating capacity. The Head of Culture and Sport responded that they needed to recover costs so the types of shows were mid-scale as the large touring shows required 1000 seats and to attract this type of show shows the ticket prices would need to increase to meet the costs.

Councillor Dunn asked how the cinema prices compared to other cinemas. The Officer responded that some cinemas offered an experience such as the Everyman Cinemas where ticket prices would be in the region of £20; in a cinema such as the Odeon ticket prices would be in the region of £7.00. The price of cinema tickets at the Gala were considerably cheaper but for a youth audience price is not always the key consideration. The Head of Culture and Sport gave members an example of when the Vue cinema had opened in Darlington the Odeon had reduced its prices to £1.00 but this is not sustainable in the long or medium term.

Councillor Turnbull asked if they had considered reducing to one cinema screen that could capitalise on showing Royal Shakespeare Company productions or West End shows.

The Head of Culture and Sport indicated that they had looked at this option. The biggest screen in other cinemas had a seating capacity of 120 but the Gala could offer a seating capacity of 500, so they could capitalise on the larger capacity. The Head of Culture and Sport advised that films can be shown in all of the room space in the Gala that is the theatre, cinemas and the studio.

Councillor Jopling suggested that they look at the niche market, as they could not compete with new cinemas in the city. She commented that the retro showings in the gala on an afternoon brought in an audience and they needed to speculate to accumulate and asked for the catering turnover figures. The Head of Culture and Sport advised that the other cinemas would do this too as they would not allow their premises to stand idle during the day. He advised that the Gala Improvement Group were exploring options. In relation to turnover for catering the Head of Culture and Sport advised that for the cinema this was in the region of £150 and for the theatre it was in the region of £300, however it was stressed that there was only a 15 minute interval to capitalise and make money. The Head of Culture and Sport advised he would get back to Councillor Jopling with the exact turnover figure for catering.

The Chairman asked if the Gala was in the Council's ownership or was it leased and whether ticketing packages involving free parking had been considered.

The Head of Culture and Sport confirmed that the council owned the building but there were some terms and conditions that had penalties, due to the millennium grant that was awarded for the project. However, the penalties in the grant were in place for a 20 year period and this would soon be fulfilled.

The Chairman asked if they had looked at providing offers on parking to attract more customers.

The Head of Culture and Sport indicated that they have offers for shows but Durham County Council does not own the parking facilities in the immediate proximity of the gala.

Councillor Howell enquired if in the context of losses driven by production averages if last year was considered to be good or bad.

The Head of Culture and Sport commented that the Gala have had a better year than last year and suggested if more in-house productions were produced this was better as the gala retained 100% of the box office in comparison to buying in a production.

Councillor Crute referred to the recent scrutiny work on retail support where they looked at attracting people into cities via the retail offer. Most cities were focusing on an evening economy and asked if this was a threat or an opportunity.

The Head of Culture and Sport indicated that they worked with surrounding businesses by providing offers such as a restaurant deal to coincide with gala performances. He commented that the lunch time performances were popular and provided another reason to come into the city.

Councillor Crute asked if the service had looked at how other town centres with theatres to see what works for them and how they cope with reducing audience numbers and attract customers during the daytime screenings.

The Head of Culture and Sport indicated that other similar venues had the same issues and he had not heard of anyone that had overcome the problems. He was aware of a Theatre that had purchased the public house next door which had been a success as they offered food as part of the theatre package.

Councillor Jopling referred to catering currently on offer at the Gala and that a more defined bar area was required with comfortable surroundings. The café served good quality food but also needed to move location to the front of the building and be given a snappy name.

The Head of Culture and Sport responded that a business plan and plans had been drawn up which would be submitted to Members in the future.

Councillor Jopling asked if they removed the cinema would this create more space for the theatre.

The Head of Culture and Sport advised that to create more capacity in the theatre building works would need to come back into the bar area which would be costly and would only create an additional 80 seats. The larger cinema space could provide alternative uses.

Mr Bolton reminded members that the DLI museum had an art gallery that was lost to Durham City when the museum closed and suggested that the cinema space could be used to display DCC's art collection. Mr Bolton went on explaining that in the south of the county Bowes Museum displayed art and held exhibitions that were well attended and the Gala could do similar in the north of the county.

The Head of Culture and Sport advised that they could make a gallery and there was also scope to join up with the Clayport Library underground. They were currently in talks with the University with regard to their art collection.

Councillor Dunn indicated that there was no reason why an exhibition could not be showcased at the Gala.

The Head of Culture and Sport advised Members that they had recently opened up the Burlison Gallery in the Town Hall on a Saturday for viewings. They intended to change the collections and have had a good response from the public.

Councillor Turnbull referred to the 'Journey', which was created for the Gala that had not been a success and suggested that something was needed that people would find interesting. Tourists visited the City Centre during the week too and advised of an occasion recently when he personally took a tourist into the Town Hall to view its attractions and asked if the Town Hall could be opened up during the week as well as a weekend to cater for all tourists.

The Head of Culture and Sport advised Members that during the winter months the Town Hall was open on Saturdays only and during the summer months it was intended to open the Town Hall to visitors on a Thursday too.

Mrs Holding indicated that the Tyne Theatre use an area for author talks which are well attended and suggested this could be something that could work at the Gala.

The Head of Culture and Sport responded that the Gala does hold author events and book signings outside of the book festival. The University also used the Gala for public lecture series. The Gala had put on additional performances on three separate occasions, which were free of charge as an incentive to tempt customers back for a paid performance.

The Chairman asked about time frames in relation to plans

Members were advised that a proposal on Millennium Square would be submitted to Cabinet by the end of 2019.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Culture and Sport for his informative presentation which was positive and encouraging.

Resolved: That the report and presentation be noted.

8 Budget Outturn Quarter 2 2018/19

The Committee considered the Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Resources and Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services which set out details of the outturn budget position for the service areas within Regeneration and Local Services. The report highlighted and explained any major variances in comparison with the budget. The Finance Manager, Regeneration and Local Services was in attendance to present the report and gave a presentation (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

Councillor Martin asked if it would be possible if the outturn reports could also show the original budget for both revenue and capital, as opposed to just the latest budget information.

The Finance Manager, Regeneration and Local Services advised that this would be included for Quarter three report.

Councillor Dunn referred to the Joint Stocks landfill site and asked for information relating to the utilisation of the landfill gas and power generation.

The Finance Manager indicated that he was unable to answer the question in relation to the long term use of the site as this was operational but he would take this back to the service for a response.

Councillor Howell sought clarification if the income figures in the Highways Services Trading at appendix 2 of the report were due to internal trading or as a result of selling the service to other authorities.

The Finance Manager responded that the figures were based on internal charges and the underspend was offset by the surplus.

Resolved: That the Quarter 2 forecast outturn position on Revenue and Capital for 2018/19 be noted.

9 Performance Management Quarter 2 2018/19

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships that presented the progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the Council's corporate performance framework for the Altogether Greener priority theme (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager was in attendance to present the report.

Councillor Crute advised that the fly tipping trends were positive but indicated that in the East of the county from November there had been an increase in the number of fly tipping incidents and inquired if there had been a huge reduction in other areas of the County.

The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager advised that it would be interesting to look at long-term trends on fly tipping on a geographical basis across the county. He agreed to look into whether this could be presented to a future committee meeting.

The Chairman referred to the pilot exercise of the members' portal, that he was part of and advised Members that the new system provided more detailed information on fly-tipping by division.

Councillor Crute suggested that Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) was an area that the committee may want to review at a future date and as part of this work the committee could take the opportunity to look at fly tipping trends.

Councillor Jopling referred to fly-tipping in her area that had not reduced and was concerned that out of 27 cameras deployed throughout the County by the County Council only one incident had been captured and asked if the cameras were in the right places as there were known hotspots.

The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager advised that where cameras are located the must be a notice warning the public of the cameras and this could be a deterrent to some would be fly tippers. If the fly tip was on private land then this would not be recorded by the County Council.

Councillor Jopling then asked if the Council liaised with landowners in relation to fly tipping on private land to resolve the issues.

The Chairman responded that the council were working with landowners and farmers on fly-tipping.

Councillor Jopling asked why the numbers were so low for fly-tipping enforcement.

The Chairman indicated that the evidence may not be strong enough to take the incident to court or the vehicle number plate could not be identified.

Councillor Howell referred to the CO₂ admissions and asked why the data was from 2016 as this was now out of date and the target from the original strategy was met.

The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager advised the Member that the target was part of the strategy. The Chairman responded that the strategy may need to be reviewed and new targets developed.

Councillor Dunn referred to the increased incidents of fly-tipping in his area that were on roads leading from the household waste recycle centre and recently 55 tyres had been dumped at St. Helen's Church at Kelloe and would be interested to see the statistics for fly tipping.

Mr Bolton suggested that it would be good to see breakdown of fly tipping in areas and if this could be further broken down into types of fly tipping as it would be interesting to see the mix giving types and indicated that in the East of the county there was the potential for fly-tipping issues from people outside of the County.

The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager advised Members that the fly-tipping incidents were coded but the household waste centres were for domestic waste only so this may cause an issue. Recent data indicated that it was bags of domestic waste that

was most often fly tipped but he would update the committee on the types of waste being fly tipped at a future meeting of the committee.

Councillor Turnbull referred to tyres and advised that there was criteria for tyre disposal and that garages must adhere to it.

Members asked if some of the fly-tipping was garden waste. The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager confirmed that some of the fly-tipping was garden waste.

Councillor Milburn referred to the roll out of the Green Move and was astounded at the amount collected and suggested that there must be very rich students in Durham City.

Mrs Holding commented that there was a cost to collect household waste and not everyone was able to get to a household waste centre and advised that the Council charged residents to remove tree clippings and in some scenarios people in trucks will pick up garden waste and dump it rather than taking it to HWRC.

Councillor Crute referred to the recent vehicle that was seized then crushed and that people were being taken advantage of as they were paying a fee to get their rubbish removed by individuals who then fly-tipped the rubbish. He indicated that this needed to be addressed.

The Chairman advised Members that this would be followed up.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

10 Minutes from the Durham Strategic Flood Prevention Group

The Minutes of the meeting of the Durham Strategic Flood Prevention Group held on 6 December 2018 were received by the Committee for information.