

LOCAL ECONOMY SCRUTINY PANEL**21 July 2009****Attendance:**

Councillors:

Anthony (Chairman) (P)

Bell (P)
Cook (P)
Henry (P)
Humby (P)
Huxstep (P)
Love (P)Pearce (P)
Sanders
Stephens
Verney (P)**Deputy Members in attendance:**

Councillor Tait (Standing Deputy for Councillor Sanders).

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Stallard (Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Culture and Sport)

1. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillor Stallard declared a personal and prejudicial interest due to her involvement as a Cabinet Member in actions taken or proposed in the Reports outlined below.

However, the Panel asked the Cabinet Member, as Portfolio Holder, to remain in the meeting, under the provisions of Sections 21(13)(a) of the Local Government Act 2000, in order that they could provide additional information to the Panel and/or answer questions.

With reference to Item 6 below (presentation on DC Leisure's partnership working with Winchester City Council) Councillor Tait declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest as an employee of Air Improve Ltd, who supply air conditioning to River Park Leisure Centre. He remained in the meeting and spoke and voted thereon.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Stephens be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Panel for the 2009/10 Municipal Year.

3. **TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

RESOLVED:

That future meetings of the Panel commence at 6.30pm and that the timetable of scheduled meetings for the 2009/10 Municipal Year be noted.

4. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held 17 March 2009 be approved and adopted.

5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

6. **DC LEISURE MANAGEMENT LTD – WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH WINCHESTER CITY COUNCIL**

(Oral Report)

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting the River Park Leisure Centre General Manager, Sarah Morgan, and DC Leisure Director, Richard Millard, who presented to the Panel.

In 2006, DC Leisure had negotiated a three and a half year extension to their contract with Winchester City Council to manage the River Park Leisure Centre. Miss Morgan and Mr Millard emphasised the importance of the DC Leisure/Winchester City Council partnership and highlighted some key achievements including the MEND (Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do it) programme, Saturday evening exercise classes and football training for young people, and the Government grant-aided free swimming initiative. Whilst funding for this free swimming project would end in 2011 it was hoped part subsidy for those with the most need would continue. The Centre was also continuing to increase its scores from the nationally accredited UK quality scheme for sport and leisure – ‘Quest’.

Mr Millard highlighted some future opportunities for the Centre, including increased participation in sports inspired by the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the Government’s drive to increase participation in sport and leisure to improve national health. Equally, the challenges of the current economic climate, and the need to reduce River Park’s carbon footprint, would require addressing.

A Member queried whether the free swimming initiative would cause any capacity issues for the Centre. In reply, Miss Morgan explained that a banding system ensured that the pool did not become overcrowded and access was available for all who wanted to swim. However the growing health agenda, and surge in participation (a 5.6% increase since January 2009), had indicated that further space could be well utilised.

The Head of Economic and Cultural Services confirmed a report on the long term future of the Leisure Centre building would be brought to Cabinet in October 2009. In the meantime, Members have already approved a recommendation to award another 10-year management contract for the operation of the current Centre, with any tendering process due to start in the autumn. Mr Millard confirmed that DC Leisure had successfully redesigned other buildings sustainably, using innovative approaches. Participation had increased to subsidise such improvements. The importance of reducing energy consumption was noted, especially as the Centre was one of the most energy-intensive buildings in the District. Whilst improvements had been made, such as a 15% saving on electricity consumption, it would be almost impossible to make further major reductions in energy usage, in view of its age and construction. A more fundamental redesign may need to be considered. Miss Morgan emphasised that care for the environment was high on DC Leisure's agenda.

RESOLVED:

That DC Leisure's achievements be noted and Mr Millard and Miss Morgan be thanked for their informative presentation.

7. **RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME ENGLAND - WINCHESTER & EAST HAMPSHIRE FIELDFARE LEADER – SUPPORTING RURAL BUSINESSES AND COMMUNITIES**
(Oral Report)

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting the Fieldfare LEADER Programme Manager, Ken Brown, who, together with the Council's Economic Development Manager, Kate Crawford, presented to the Panel.

The LEADER concept was explained to Members. The programme had £2.25m allocated funding for December 2008 - December 2013 and this could be used to part-fund projects such as farm diversification, micro-business training, green tourism development and community projects, for example the rebuilding of a village hall. The programme was very customer focused and workshops and information days had been set up to help customers through the complex application process, especially as only one application could be made by a group. The area had received more applications than any other Local Action Group and the Economy and Cultural Services Division was in the process of recruiting another member of staff (funded by LEADER) to ease the current workload. To date five grants had been approved with a total value of over £100,000.

In response to Members' questions Mr Brown clarified that, if a project failed to deliver its planned objectives, the ownership of the asset remained with the Local Action Group until project sign-off.

RESOLVED:

That the achievements outlined be noted and Mr Brown and Miss Crawford be thanked for their informative presentation.

8. **ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL SERVICES DIVISION: PERFORMANCE MONITORING QUARTER 4 UPDATE FOR 2008/09 AND QUARTER 1 UPDATE FOR 2009/10**

(Report [LE71](#) refers)

The Head of Economic and Cultural Services introduced the Report and confirmed that, despite a Divisional underspend, a healthy level of activity had taken place within the team. Members queried the 'write down' on the City Museum and the Head of Economic and Cultural Services agreed to discuss this with the Principal Financial Accountant and report back to Members.

The Museums collection had now been moved from Hyde to the new store at F2 in Bar End to provide a modern facility for the collections.

Councillor Stallard confirmed that, due to the Council's Vacancy Management Programme, recruitment of a Sports Development Officer had been delayed but that a new appointee should take up the post in September 2009. The Council had also not become involved in the Hampshire Youth Games this year and a review would be undertaken as to whether this was a good use of the new Sports Development Officer's time.

Members discussed the Westgate Museum, and the Head of Economic and Cultural Services confirmed the City Council had a duty of care to this ancient building and the Tudor ceiling (on loan from Winchester College) held within it. It was agreed that the Culture and the Economy Informal Scrutiny Group would address key issues surrounding the Museum at a future meeting. The Head of Economic and Cultural Services also agreed to investigate the possibility of showing the weekly cost of running each museum on the donation boxes where these were displayed.

Members referred to the information within the Report on the Theatre Royal. The Panel noted that detailed information had been provided, such as customer profiles and key trends. It was explained that the targets shown were agreed in the Division's business plan each year. The small size of the building, which limited the type of productions that could be commissioned, was problematic. Moreover, some performances had been less successful than predicted during the current economic climate, with attendance figures dropping during the 1st Quarter. A balance between amateur dramatics and more commercial theatre was sought to suit all the communities' tastes. An improved online booking system was now in place and the Theatre was being encouraged to work with Winchester Discovery Centre to utilise their detailed marketing database.

A Member expressed concern that wider sections of the community, such as those receiving benefits, were not currently addressed by the Theatre's programme and ticket structure, particularly as only 29 claimants had taken up the concessionary ticket offer in comparison to 1200 senior citizen tickets sold. It was agreed that those with most need should be targeted but it was understood that, due to ongoing funding issues, there may be some removal of concessionary tickets, and other radical options, to address the financial problems. It was also highlighted that marketing costs of concessionary tickets were high and, in the current climate, such costs were not identified as essential.

Members asked that the Head of Economic and Cultural Services obtain figures for the percentage occupancy of the Theatre for the months of April-July 2009 and that this data be provided within future reports, to assist the Panel in their scrutiny of the operation of the Theatre.

Members noted that the Chairman of the Theatre Royal was attending the meeting of the Culture and the Economy Informal Scrutiny Group on 29 July 2009. Other Members of the Panel were welcome to attend as observers.

RESOLVED:

1. That the monitoring information in the Report be noted and that the Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Culture and Support have regard to the Panel's concerns about the current performance of the Theatre Royal, as detailed above, particularly concerning the need for social inclusion.
2. That the Westgate Museum be discussed at a future Culture and the Economy Informal Scrutiny Group Meeting.
3. That the figures for the percentage occupancy of the Theatre for the months of April-July 2009 be provided to Members and that this data be provided in future reports to the Panel.

9. **BIANNUAL REPORT OF THE WINCHESTER ARCHIVIST**
(Report [LE73](#) refers)

The Head of Economic and Cultural Services introduced the report, emphasising the high level of detail contained within it. She clarified that users of the Hampshire Records Office were not charged for accessing the resources held there. If any possible future income stream were to be sought from visitors, this was likely to be utilised by the County Council, rather than the City Council, as a reflection of their higher investment in funding the building and its operations.

RESOLVED:

That the service provided by the Winchester Archivist was delivering the Council's corporate objectives and represented value for money for the community.

10. **INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP FINAL REPORT: TOURISM STRATEGY REVIEW**
(Report [LE72](#) refers)

The Head of Economic and Cultural Services explained that, following a detailed progress report at the November 2008 panel meeting, the Tourism

Strategy Informal Scrutiny Group had now concluded its work and this Report provided an updated summary of the Group's recommendations.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the Report be noted, including the proposed timetable for the completion of the ten-year economic strategy for the District.

11. **APPOINTMENT OF INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUPS 2009/10**

(Report [LE70](#) refers)

The Panel noted the Place Survey information appended to the Report and agreed to put forward any suggestions for Informal Scrutiny Groups to the Chairman as they arose.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Tourism Strategy Informal Scrutiny Group be not re-appointed for the 2009/10 Municipal Year.

2. That the Culture and the Economy Informal Scrutiny Group continues its work and reports its findings to the 17 November 2009 meeting of the Panel.

3. That Councillors Anthony, Bell, Cook, Pearce, Sanders and Tait be re-appointed to the Culture and Economy Informal Scrutiny Group.

4. That further topics for scrutiny review be identified and submitted to the Chairman for consideration.

12. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

(Report [PS375](#) refers)

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Work Programme, as set out on the reverse of the agenda, and as extracted from Report PS375, be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 8.45pm.

Chairman