

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

19 JULY 2011

Present :- Councillor Andrew Ellis (Chairman)
Councillors Nigel Chapman (Former Mayor) ,
Nick Cope, Bill Frame, Theresa Higgins, Kim Naish,
Gerard Oxford, Will Quince, Colin Sykes and
Dennis Willetts

Also in Attendance :- Councillor Nick Barlow
Councillor Martin Hunt
Councillor Nigel Offen
Councillor Lesley Scott-Boutell
Councillor Paul Smith
Councillor Anne Turrell

7. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2011 was confirmed as a correct record.

8. Items requested by members of the Panel and other Members

Councillor Offen addressed the panel, requesting that the Panel should carry out further follow-up scrutiny in respect of the Greenways (HX Care Home) review.

Councillor Offen recapped on the work undertaken by the Panel in 2010-11 that culminated in a response to the Panel's concerns from the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

Councillor Offen said the response from the CQC did not address adequately the concerns expressed by Members and asked the Panel to undertake further investigative work into the issues surrounding the closure of the Greenways Care Home.

Members agreed that the CQC could have provided a more detailed response than the one received, considered unsatisfactory.

It was agreed that the Scrutiny Officer would arrange a meeting with the Chairman and Councillor Offen to discuss how we could proceed, which in turn would be fed back to the Panel at the next meeting.

Councillor Nick Cope (in respect of being a Director of the Mercury Theatre Limited) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

9. Review of the Council's funding and partnership delivery arrangements with

Colchester Arts Centre, Firstsite and the Mercury Theatre

The following invitees attended the meeting for this item;

Mr. Anthony Roberts, Colchester Arts Centre
Ms. Kath Wood, firstsite
Mr. Wayne Warner, firstsite
Mr. Chris Paveley, Chair firstsite
Ms. Dee Evans, Mercury Theatre
Mr. Adrian Grady, Mercury Theatre
Mr. Tony Casement, Mercury Theatre

Also in attendance for this item;

Councillor Nick Barlow, Portfolio Holder for Commerce and Sustainability
Councillor Paul Smith, Portfolio Holder for Resources and ICT
Ms. Lindsay Barker, Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration
Ms. Josie Worner, Cultural Services Manager

Have Your Say

Mr. Marc De'ath addressed the Panel, speaking about 'fifteen Queen Street' (fQS), "the home of creativity in Colchester". fQS is a firstsite facility that provides super-fast WIFI, meeting rooms, collaborative workshop space, a library full of inspirational books and journals, chill-out gardens, repro equipment and giant 'shared working' whiteboards, as well as Membership, that guarantees unrivalled access to a long list of forthcoming events, workshops, talks, exhibitions and community projects and enables 15 Queen Street to be used as a trading address.

Mr. De'ath said fQS provided a lifeline to both himself and others who shared this facility and he was indebted to firstsite for this opportunity. fQS provided the opportunity of a new sense of focus and hope and was a catalyst to his own civic pride, invigorating Colchester and with it a greater identity. In times of austerity it was an opportunity to make the most of a unique facility that provided a positive feedback, which enabled firstsite to build on what had already been achieved.

Ms. Tracy Allen addressed the Panel concerning the Mercury Theatre (MT). Ms. Allen said her first involvement with MT was a family experience for herself and her daughter, the Grapes of Wrath production. Ms. Allen said everyone involved in the production was extremely welcoming, putting all people new to the theatre group at ease, people of all age groups and people with disabilities, a true reflection of the local community. Ms. Allen said her involvement had helped her with public speaking, useful for her school daytime job. The experience had also been positive for her daughter, providing an interest outside of television, making friends, and who wished to pass on a message "the Mercury Theatre Rocks". Ms. Allen concluded by saying both her and her daughter is involved in a new production of 'A Winter's Tale'.

Ms. Amy Hicks addressed the Panel to speak about her involvement with the Colchester Arts Centre (CAC). Ms. Hicks said before working at CAC, she did not

enjoy her job at that time and had no clear aim. She was placed at CAC as part of the future jobs fund scheme. Whilst having no experience of the work at CAC, she had succeeded with a passion, the first step on the arts ladder. Ms. Hicks said she has gained experience in all aspects of work, with invaluable mentoring from staff at CAC, and her success with the Fashion Show had been a real confidence booster. Ms Hicks said she now felt far more organised and motivated and loved the work she was doing, enjoying the adage 'live to work'.

Councillor Lesley Scott Boutell addressed the Panel, saying that whilst she was not an 'arty' type of person herself, she understood the vital role played by the three arts partners to culture and arts in Colchester, and their role in achieving the Council's strategic priorities.

Councillor Scott-Boutell said her daughter is a Member of the Youth Theatre and the Mercury Theatre (MT) had played an important role in her life, with links between the MT and her daughter's Stanway school.

Councillor Scott-Boutell thanked the Colchester Arts Centre for their help and assistance in holding the Colchester Frock Swop event that had helped to promote recycling in Colchester, with people making use of clothes that others no longer had a use for. Councillor Scott-Boutell concluded by asking how quickly would any new funding streams to the arts partners effect the level of funding contribution from the Council.

Introduction

Councillor Nick Barlow, Portfolio Holder for Commerce and Sustainability introduced the item on the Review of the Council's funding and partnership arrangements with Colchester Arts Centre, firstsite and the Mercury Theatre.

Councillor Barlow said he was pleased to be working with the Arts partners, gratified by their work, and welcomed the opportunity for the Panel to consider the partnership delivery arrangements.

Councillor Paul Smith, Portfolio Holder for Resources and ICT addressed the Panel saying this review was an eventful experience, quite different to previous reviews where the discussions had focused on the Visual Arts Facility building.

Councillor Smith said the Council was now looking to the future, cause for celebration, and this was an opportunity for Members to see how it fits with the Council's strategic objectives. firstsite will become a creative centre of expertise, providing new local jobs, and for the local creative industries, an economic edge.

In response to Councillor Willetts, Councillor Barlow said he understood any concerns regarding cuts in grants and services, but the Council was experiencing budget pressures and there are shortfalls across all areas of the Council. In an ideal world any reduction in funding would not be necessary, but in this real world there is a need for many services and partners to have funding reduced. Councillor Barlow said the arts is valued and is a very important part of the Council's Strategic Priorities, but that said the

budget pressures still remain.

Presentation

The partners representatives gave a presentation, the scope of which was as follows;

- Working with Colchester Borough Council
- Achievement on the Council's strategic priorities
- Return on investment

Mr. Wayne Warner, firstsite, gave an overview of the work of firstsite.

Mr. Tony Casement, Mercury Theatre (MT), gave an overview of the work of the Mercury Theatre.

Mr. Casement spoke about the Community Outreach and Development programme, giving examples of individual people and programmes that had benefitted from the initiative, reading out an inspirational letter from Mr. Albert Weir, a young disabled person, involved in the 'Grapes of Wrath' production.

Mr. Casement spoke about 'Addressing young people's needs', working directly with schools and the young people of Colchester. Two Summer Schools (drama groups) with no fees attached, and in conjunction with the University of Essex and two Community Productions in the MT Studio.

In respect of 'Enabling Job Creation and developing the skills economy', Mr. Casement said jobs are created such as that mentioned by one of the Have Your Say speakers. The first graduate, from RADA, will be starting work with the MT this year.

Ms. Dee Evans addressed the Panel saying it was important that the arts had a positive and meaningful effect on individuals, broadening horizons and enhancing self-esteem. She hoped the local work of the Town's art providers was positively received, saying the MT receives hundreds of complimentary emails and letters from people, though also receiving some providing critical comments.

Ms. Evans said the local arts partners provide an important facility, diverse and affordable, an invaluable experience for all.

Mr. Anthony Roberts, Colchester Arts Centre, gave an overview of the work at the Colchester Arts Centre (CAC).

Mr. Roberts provided a breakdown of the income, number of visitors and demographics of the CAC. Electronic interaction is an important part of the lives of younger people, reflected in the number of interactions in respect of the CAC, with Mr. Roberts explaining there had been interaction on Facebook (2017), Twitter (1163) and YouTube (750 separate hits).

Mr. Roberts spoke about the Fundamental Service Review undertaken by the Arts Partners and the positive effect this had had on the Community Outreach and Development Project, working together in respect of the 'fete' project. Pulling

resources had proven to be an opportunity to make a bigger impact collectively, than on an individual basis. The Willowbrook School Fete project had collectively raised £30,000, providing for a larger scale project that included a Marquee, film, live performance and crafts.

Ms. Kath Wood, firstsite, spoke about the work of firstsite, saying they continue to work with a range of partners. firstsite have a programme of work including projects, exhibitions and publications from established and emerging artists and extensive learning opportunities and artist support initiatives. As a partner of Plus Tate, this was an opportunity to exchange ideas, knowledge, skills and resources, as well as programmes and collections.

In regards to 'Promoting Healthy Living and inclusive lifestyle', Ms. Wood spoke about their work with serviceman's wives and work concerning the national Schools Programme, in partnership with the Colchester Institute.

'fifteen Queen Street' was a new creative hub in Colchester, spoken about by Mr. De'ath, one of the Have Your Say speakers, and the new visual arts building will provide the impetus for new investment in the area.

Ms. Wood said firstsite remained committed to becoming nationally significant and locally relevant, and welcomed the continued support by Colchester Borough Council.

Questions and Answers

In response to Councillor Sykes, Ms. Josie Worner, Cultural Services Manager explained that the key targets for performance as noted in the three partners individual funding agreements are populated by the partners, and is a reflection of their own business / organisation. The language is from the organisations themselves, a reflection of what the organisation is doing and tends to do.

Councillor Smith responded to Councillor Cope in regards to the 2011-12 Budget and the funding for the arts organisations, saying the Budget process was set out on page 35 of the agenda under the Budget Strategy item, and at this time he was not in a position to confirm or otherwise the funding for 2012-13. Councillor Smith said he valued the work of the Arts organisations, and regretted the recent reductions in funding but the Cabinet was committed to doing it's very best to fit the Budget to the Strategic Priorities. In response to Councillor Ellis, Councillor Barlow said whilst the Cabinet had not adopted the Panel's proposal from last year, for an indication to the arts providers of two future years funding to be given without prejudice at the same time as the current grant is agreed, the Cabinet are actively looking at ways to providing an estimation of future years funding to the arts providers.

In regards to the effects of current reduced funding, Mr. Grady (MT) responded to Councillor Willetts, saying cuts from the three major funding partners amounted to £180,000. The MT had begun a cost reduction exercise, losing posts as a consequence of this, but endeavouring to maintain the quality of production at the same time.

The Fundamental Service Review process with the CAC and firstsite had been useful, focusing on collaborative work that maximised projects but with less individual funding required. A re-organisation of the back-office business had also resulted in a reduction in overhead costs. A future box-office system is also being considered. Mr. Grady said the MT is managing at present though there remained grave concerns for the future. Ms. Evans said the funding reductions would take serious effect from next year onwards, an enormous challenge, with no certainty over the MT viability.

Mr. Warner (firstsite) said the reduction in funding has resulted in the loss of jobs and at a time when firstsite take up occupancy of the new arts building, and a lot of focus has been on the delivery of this project. The effect of reduced funding would impinge on the number of projects that could be completed.

Mr. Roberts (CAC) said reduced funding at the CAC means a reduction in events that provide a nil return, a very important platform for young and up and coming writers and performers. There will be less opportunity for these in future years.

Ms. Wood (firstsite) said the overall funding is more reliant on that of Colchester Borough Council, linked to the other two major funding partners and should the Council's funding fracture it could be the start of a downward spiral.

Ms. Evans responded to Councillor Naish's concern that the three businesses work seemed to lean heavily to addressing the needs of younger people, by saying the funding agreements tend to be written silo fashion, and there is no particular focus on young people. Ms. Wood said many of the projects are inter-generational. Ms. Wood also confirmed to Councillor Naish that it is understood about the potential congestion caused by events and firstsite do have the appropriate dialogue with the Highways Agency when pre-planning such events.

Councillor T. Higgins thanked and congratulated the speakers on their presentations, saying creative industries accounted for 18% of businesses in Colchester against a national average of 8%. Councillor Higgins said it would be helpful if the arts organisations could work in collaboration with local restaurants and bars to provide discounted meals prior to evening performances. Councillor G. Oxford agreed with Councillor Higgins, but said such businesses must be DDA compliant.

Councillor Higgins proposed that the Panel agree to the proposal from 2010-11 to provide an indication of two future years funding at the same time as the current grant is agreed, a proposal later seconded by Councillor Chapman. Councillor Ellis said continuity in funding is a good idea. Ms. Evans said the Arts Council request a three year Business Plan, a basis for linking to a similar period of grant support.

In response to Councillor Chapman, Mr. Grady said business sponsorship / corporate revenue was very important, £18,000 per annum for the MT. The MT, along with other major regional theatres are looking to collaborate on a joint approach, to be re-launched, and going out to a the wider region shortly, though the MT is not yet in a position to invest in this project. Ms. Wood said a new membership scheme for the new firstsite building is to be launched shortly. Mr. Warner confirmed that £1.2 million had already been raised towards the capital project. Mr. Roberts said it was getting

ever more difficult to raise these funds during a period of economic downturn, but that said, the arts partners are working collaboratively to find new ways of generating corporate income.

Councillor Quince felt the £672,000 VAT windfall received in 2010/11, should, through consultation, enable organisations such as the arts partners to bid for the money.

Councillor Ellis thanked the arts partners for attending the meeting and for their excellent presentation(s), saying he had learnt a lot and had a greater appreciation of the work undertaken by the organisations.

Members concurred with Councillor Ellis, Councillor Oxford saying it had been a fair and balanced discussion. Members agreed to a recommendation to Cabinet to give an indication of two future years funding at the time that the current grant is agreed.

Councillor Smith noted the Panel's request for giving an indication for future funding, and this would be considered by the Cabinet.

RESOLVED that the Panel;

- i) Considered and noted the current performances against the current standards.
- ii) Considered and noted the fit between the contribution to the funded arts partners and the Council's Strategic Priorities.
- iii) Requested the Cabinet to consider providing an indication of two future years funding at the same time as the current grant(s) is agreed.

10. 2012/13 Budget Strategy, Medium Term Financial Forecast and Budget Timetable

Mr. Sean Plummer, Finance Manager, gave a brief introduction to the report on the 2012-13 Budget Strategy, Medium Term Financial Forecast and Budget Timetable, focusing on the Budget Forecast for 2012-13 within section 4 of the report that spelt out the key assumptions within the forecast.

Councillor Sykes thanked officers for the report, the style of which was introduced in 2002, a format that was very easy to read and understand. In response to Councillor Sykes enquiry about the New Homes Bonus, Councillor Smith (Portfolio Holder for Resources and ICT) and Mr. Plummer confirmed that the rules around spending this money are clear, with Council's allowed total flexibility on how they spend the money. Councillor Smith and Mr. Plummer also confirmed to Councillor Quince that because the Council had no increase in the Council Tax for 2011-12, the Council would continue to receive the same level of grant for each year to 2014-15. This would not prevent the Council from increasing Council Tax during the future years, without penalty. Whilst the 2012-13 forecast may change, Councillor Turrell, Leader of the Council said it was the Cabinet's intention to present a Budget with no increase to Council Tax.

Councillor Smith responded to Councillor Quince concerning the risks within the current budget of potential claims against the Council for compensation to pay and entry fees within sport, leisure and cultural facilities, and in respect of the VAT refund, saying the risk of any claim was minimal.

RESOLVED that the panel considered and noted the 2012-13 Budget Strategy, Medium Term Financial Forecast and Budget Timetable.

11. Trial - Doorstep collection of food waste

Councillor Martin Hunt, Portfolio Holder for Street and Waste Services introduced the item on the trial of doorstep collection of food waste, thanking the Chairman for taking this item at late notice.

Mr. Matthew Young, Head of Street Services and Mr. Paul English, Street Care and Recycling Operations Manager attended the meeting and Mr. Young gave a brief introduction to the report, a pre-decision (pre-scrutiny) review of the Portfolio Holder decision on the trial of doorstep collection of food waste.

In response to Councillor T. Higgins, Mr. Young said officers are looking at ways to extend the trial to include blocks of flats. Officers will be visiting and learning from other regional Councils where this type of collection is undertaken.

In response to Councillor Ellis, Mr. Young said officers are keen that the trial was undertaken where the full scheme on collection had been introduced. Food recycling was the current scheme to be introduced, and once each scheme like this is fully integrated so movement through to the next scheme will happen, a step by step process.

In response to Councillor Quince, who in principle supported the scheme, but was concerned about the costs given the Council was not signed up to County Waste project, Councillor Hunt said the County Wide initiative was a 25 year contract with many variables, and already some Essex local authorities are voicing concern over the income streams from within the contract. Mr. Young said the trial area included a part of the St Andrews Ward, so as to include a deprived area within the process, an opportunity to consult in the area to try to determine why recycling rates are low. Some people will inevitably struggle with the concept, and finding reasons why, will help officers with the education process. Councillor hunt said he sincerely hoped that should the trial be successful, funds would be made available to extend across the Borough.

In response to Councillor Willetts, Mr. Young said the shift of food waste from composting to recycling will improve Colchester's recycling rate, good in recycling terms as composted waste did not count towards recycling rates. This scheme will improve recycling rates and along with other schemes to be trialled and introduced would help Colchester move closer towards the aspiration of a 60% recycling rate. Mr. Young also confirmed that it had been proven nationally, that where food waste collection is successful it provides the opportunity to collect residual waste on a two-

weekly cycle. Councillor Hunt confirmed that whatever trials are undertaken and implemented there was no consideration being given to providing wheelie bins to collect residual waste. Councillor Hunt hoped the trial would be successful, and if it is, and only when it is felt appropriate and sensible, would a two-weekly collection be considered.

Mr. English confirmed to Councillor Willetts that in-cab technology would not be used in collection vehicles used in the trial. This technology had not yet been procured, and any implementation process will happen simultaneously to all the collection vehicles. Mr. English also said he did not anticipate any additional costs for the trial, than those already identified in the report.

Mr. Young confirmed that to officer's knowledge, flies, pests and vermin has not been cause for concern in other local authorities providing a food waste collection. That said, the Council's Health Officers had been notified of the trial and asked to monitor for such eventualities.

In response to Councillor Sykes, Mr. English clarified what roads within the Stanway Ward would be included within the food waste collection trial. Mr. English also agreed to provide Councillors in the wards subject to the trial, a list of the roads within their wards to be trialled.

Mr. English and Mr. Young responded to Councillor Chapman in respect of the £2 household promotional costs, saying this cost would include a leaflet drop and a short-term appointment to complete a comprehensive door to door consultation process. The involvement of Ward and Parish Councillors and customer skills for collection crews was vital in encouraging community engagement. Councillor Frame suggested that Residents Associations should also be notified of the trial.

Councillor Hunt understood Councillor Oxford's concerns about the trial being undertaken in parts of the Highwoods Ward given that a recent survey by the Highwoods Independent Group had shown a resounding support for weekly black bag collection. The area to be trialled was determined by officers, but if they could find another area with similar demographics and in a geographically appropriate area that could be dovetailed into the trial, then such a change would be considered.

Mr. English confirmed to Councillor Ellis that the trial method of collection was the most cost effective and speediest form of collection of a number of different methods considered by officers. Mr. Young said there is evidence from other local authorities that this type of collection does bring about behavioural change, that is, a changing of food buying habits and a knock-on effect of a reduction in the overall level of waste.

RESOLVED that the panel considered, commented on and noted the Portfolio Holder decision setting out the details of the proposed Doorstep Food Waste Collection trial.

12. Work Programme

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the revised Work Programme for 2011-12.