

# Trading Board

Wednesday, 07 March 2018

**Attendees:** Councillor Robert Davidson, Councillor Chris Pearson, Councillor Rosalind Scott, Councillor Lesley Scott-Boutell  
**Substitutes:** Councillor Vic Flores (for Councillor Lewis Barber), Councillor Darius Laws (for Councillor Kevin Bentley)  
**Also Present:** Councillor Smith

## 178 Minutes of Previous Meeting

*RESOLVED* that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

## 179 Colchester Commercial Holdings Ltd Colchester Amphora Trading - Period 10

The Board considered a report from Colchester Commercial Holdings Ltd Colchester Amphora Trading reporting on the activity within each of the trading services up to period 10 2017/18. Graham Lewis, Senior Commercial Manager, attended to assist the Board.

It was reported that considerable work was being undertaken to market and promote Leisure World. A #My Goal and a January Lifestyles Special Offer had generated significant higher level of new memberships than had been sold before over the corresponding period. A further major campaign was planned for March. Other marketing initiatives included developing relations with key partners and businesses. For example an agreement had been reached with a construction company for 200 "New Home" offer leaflets to be distributed in new developments. Class occupancy at Leisure World was at 73%, which was above target. Considerable efforts were underway to try and increase class occupancy further and Leisure World was seeking to reorganise the dryside activities in order to maximise income.

In response to questions from members of the Board clarification was provided about how the membership and occupancy figures were calculated. The significant increase in gym visits was a consequence of the investment and development of the gym. The increase in the number of memberships had also resulted in increased usage of classes, as members had free access to classes. In response to questions it was also explained that there had been no drop off in the figures throughout January, although it was

anticipated that this would begin to be reflected in the figures for February, and further initiatives were planned in March to maintain usage and income.

The Board also explored what efforts were made to exploit the pre-commute market. Leisure World's opening hours were 6am to 10 or 11 pm. Earlier and later opening hours had been tried without significant success. It was suggested that off peak sessions and classes should be made available and priced to attract those who may struggle to attend at peak times, such as those on low incomes or had a disability. In response to a query from a member of the Board, the Commercial Manager undertook to look into the evacuation procedures for users with disabilities, including hearing loss.

It was also stressed that the Sport and Leisure service was committed to improving the leisure centres at Highwoods and Tiptree, each of which had unique facilities and offers.

Councillor Smith, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, was invited to address the Board and explained that the Council had been successful in a bid for Sports England funding. It would receive a share of £100 million to increase participation in sport. This was in addition to the funding Sport England were contributing to the Northern Gateway scheme.

In respect of the Events service, it was reported that whilst there had been a significant increase in income, this had been offset by an increase in costs. The service was continuing to look at how costs could be more effectively contained, and also how secondary spend could be maximised. Improvements to the audience and performer areas at Charter Hall were progressing. This was generating more interest in Charter Hall as a venue, and the quality of the acts being booked was improving. Sales for the concerts in Castle Park were progressing well and were among the highest on both of the tours. These were being run as a trial events to test the market for such events in Colchester. The Council was charging for the use of Castle Park and would also generate an income stream through car parking. All other income would go to the promoter, who was bearing the majority of the risk. Should the events prove successful, future events could be delivered on a different arrangement, such as split profits.

The Board also explored the possibility of World Cup fixtures being screened on a large screen in Castle Park. It was explained that this had been investigated into but in view of concerns about impact on residential amenity, clashes with Wimbledon matches and the impact on town centre businesses who were also planning to screen the World Cup, it had been decided not to proceed.

In terms of Helpline the new rota was now in place and now recruitment was underway to replace core full time staff and casuals. In particular the Service Development Manager position had been advertised. There had been a net increase in the number of

connections and a 14% growth in net surplus was predicted.

The Board stressed that Helpline was a success not just in commercial terms, but also in the valuable service it provided. The Board also explored whether Helpline had explored the commercial opportunities in the monitoring of properties. It was confirmed that this would be looked at, but it was necessary to enter the market with the right product at the right time. The appointment of the Service Development Manager would improve the service's ability to "horizon scan" and take advantage of commercial opportunities. It was also suggested that there may be some benefit in exploring alternative venues for the hosting of the service.

The Board also discussed the reporting arrangements, should the proposals for the future of the Trading Board be agreed. It was confirmed that the reports on the commercial services for each period would be submitted to the board of Colchester Commercial Holdings Ltd, and the subsidiary companies would receive more detailed reports. Building Control and Bereavement Services had been retained as services that would be managed directly by the Council. As with all Council services, they would remain subject to efficiency reviews and initiatives to maximise income.

*RESOLVED* that the report be noted.

## **180 Future of the Trading Board**

The Board considered a report on the future direction and purpose of the Trading Board. Adrian Pritchard, Chief Executive presented the report and assisted the Board.

Councillor Smith attended and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Board. He expressed that Cabinet's thanks to the Trading Board for its work over the previous five years. It had been an excellent example of cross party working for the greater benefit of the residents of Colchester. The success of this cross party approach was reflected in the membership of the board of Colchester Commercial Holdings Ltd, which also had membership across the political spectrum. The Cabinet needed further assistance on policy issues, and a forum where Councillors could provide expertise and develop policy in a non-partisan way would be welcomed. It was right to recognise that the work of the Trading Board was complete and that it was time to move on in a new direction. He reiterated the Cabinet's thanks to every member who had served on the Trading Board.

Adrian Pritchard explained that the Trading Board had been very successful in developing a commercial approach without losing the public sector ethos. Following the creation of the commercial companies, the commercial agenda had moved on. The Trading Board had completed its original aims and it was suggested that its

responsibilities in respect of Colchester Commercial Holdings Ltd be transferred to other Committees. The role of the shareholder committee could be undertaken by the Governance and Audit Committee, whilst the Scrutiny Panel would have a role in scrutinising its performance, in the same way as it did for Colchester Borough Homes Ltd.

This would free up the Board as a resource to take on a policy development role. This was in line with the conclusions of the informal workshop held by the Board to discuss its role and work programme in November 2017, where it was suggested that its terms of reference should be amended to include advising Cabinet on wider policy issues. There were a number of issues, such as rough sleeping, homelessness and the environment, on which there would be value in a Panel looking in depth and making policy recommendations to Cabinet. A report would be submitted to the Annual Meeting in May 2018 proposing that the Council make the necessary amendments to the Constitution to give effect to these proposals.

In discussion, the importance of ensuring that the Panel was properly resourced was stressed. It was explained that the necessary policy work would be undertaken by officers in the relevant service area. However it would also be incumbent on Councillors on the Panel to bring ideas and undertake research also. Members of the Board indicated they welcomed the breadth and depth of the work it could do in terms of policy development and the potential it had to depoliticise issues. It would also be an excellent way to engage residents and counter misinformation.

*RESOLVED* that the contents of the report be noted.

#### **181 Minutes - Part B**

**The Board resolved under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the public from the meeting for the following item as it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.**

*RESOLVED* that the not for publication extract of the minutes of the meeting on 24 January 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

#### **182 Colchester Commercial Holdings Ltd Period 10 2017-18**

**The Board resolved under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the public from the meeting for the following item as it involved the likely**

**disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.**

This minute is not for publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)).

**183 Thanks**

*RESOLVED* that the Board's thanks to Graham Lewis, Senior Commercial Manager, Colchester Commercial Holdings Ltd, for his work and support to the Board be formally recorded.