

## STRATEGIC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 2 MARCH 2010

*Present :-* Councillor Christopher Arnold (Chairman)  
Councillors Mark Cory, Mike Hogg,  
Jackie Maclean, Gaye Pyman, Laura Sykes,  
Nick Taylor, Dennis Willetts and Julie Young

*Substitute Members :-* Councillor Barrie Cook for Councillor Jon Manning  
Councillor Michael Lilley for Councillor Kim Naish

### 54. Minutes

*RESOLVED* that the minute of the meeting held on 9 February 2010 was confirmed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

Councillor Hogg had not been present at the meeting, having given his apologies.

Minute 50, 'Colchester Community Stadium Company', the resolution to read as follows;

*RESOLVED* that the panel:

- i) Commented on and noted the work of the Colchester Community Stadium Limited.
- ii) Requested the Colchester Community Stadium Company consider in the interests of openness and transparency, and as the manager of the football stadium, the publication of all key Performance Indicator information as set out in the service agreement between the company and the football club.

**Councillor Julie Young (in respect of his-her membership of Essex County Council) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)**

### 55. Investment in Colchester's Arts and Culture

#### **Have Your Say - Investment in Colchester's Arts and Culture**

Mr. George Pipe addressed the panel saying he hadn't known a time in his life when he wasn't aware of the Colchester Arts Centre, living in close proximity to the venue.

Mr. Pipe said his father, a keen and frequent visitor to the Centre, had always

been anecdotal about his visits and recollections. Mr. Pipe saw his first gig at the Centre in 2008, by a band called 'We are the Ocean', describing his excitement prior to going to the Centre and the fun and excitement from the concert. Mr. Pipe said he undertook his Work Experience at the Centre, gaining invaluable experience and an appreciation of how a concert came together.

Mr. Pipe concluded by saying the Colchester Arts Centre was a beacon for all those people who love live performance and hoped it would continue to be a part of his and other people's lives.

In response to Councillor Willetts, Mr. Pipe said he would like to see more club nights at the centre, focusing on playing all genres of recorded music, bringing together people of all age groups for what are great social music gatherings.

Ms. Kim Bennett, a local resident for twenty two years, addressed the panel to talk of her recent involvement with The Mercury Theatre, her first experiences of live theatre with a variety of local community groups involving community actors.

Ms. Bennett said her daughter, completing her B-Tech educational course and had gained invaluable experience through a recent tour of the inner sanctum of The Mercury Theatre.

Ms. Bennett said the work of the arts organisations should continue as they provide so many opportunities to so many people.

Ms. Cheverst addressed the panel, explaining she was a Project Manager of Slack Space Colchester (SSC), linked to Firstsite. Through their partnership with Firstsite it was possible to provide art to empty shop fronts, opening up artistic vision to those who pass by.

Ms. Cheverst said Firstsite had provided unflinching support and advise, allowing SSC to do what they do best without changing their ideas, nurturing without controlling, and to their credit, without them SSC could not have achieved what they had.

Ms. Cheverst concluded by quantifying the number of visitors to their exhibitions, saying without Firstsite support this would not have been possible, that Colchester should be proud of what has been achieved.

## **Investment in Colchester's Arts and Culture**

The following invited guests attended the meeting for this item;

Ms. Andrea Stark, Arts Council England East  
Ms. Helen Lax, Arts Council England East  
Councillor Jeremy Lucas, Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Culture and  
Arts,  
Essex County Council  
Mr. Anthony Roberts, Colchester Arts Centre  
Mr. Nigel Hildreth, Chair Colchester Arts Centre  
Ms. Kath Wood, Firstsite  
Mr. Wayne Warner, Firstsite  
Mr. Chris Paveley, Chair Firstsite  
Ms. Dee Evans, The Mercury Theatre  
Mr. Adrian Grady, The Mercury Theatre  
Mr. Tony Casement, The Mercury Theatre  
Dr Elizabeth Hall, Chair The Mercury Theatre

The following officers attended the meeting for this item;

Mr. Ian Vipond, Executive Director  
Ms. Josie Worner, Cultural Services Manager

Ms. Stark addressed the panel saying she was delighted to attend the meeting and address the panel.

Ms. Stark said the funding partnership was one of the most successful in the East of England, a partnership with a collective vision that had matured in a very meaningful way.

In regards to providing arts and culture to the area, Ms. Stark said the partnership was in it for the long haul, and it does take time to change the aspirations of people, but it would provide many benefits to the local economy and the local community, for example, catering outlets.

Ms. Stark said there was a bohemian feel to Colchester, with artists crawling

out of the woodwork, a quality of critical mass of art originals, with regular national press coverage.

Ms. Stark concluded by saying it was her belief that partnerships work when reciprocal, and what Colchester has is a highly reciprocal partnership, providing 'stand out' arts and culture to the region, with mature conversations ongoing towards future sustainability.

Given the great negativity towards the new Visual Arts Facility, Councillor Willetts asked about the vision of what this investment will bring to Colchester. In response, Ms. Stark said this bespoke building was a sign of the town's ambition, outward looking, income generating and concerned with the quality of life to both visitors and the local community. Firstsite would continue to provide what they do best, a popular way to engaging people, both visitors and locals, with the arts. The building would be 'drop-dead gorgeous', a beautiful building providing an experience for visitors, international exhibitions, and for the first time bespoke educational facilities that we can only dream of at present. It has been designed and will be managed to ensure that Colchester's arts and culture is highly regarded, a place that is serious about culture and creativity.

In response to Councillor Hogg, Ms. Stark was aware of the negativity that has surrounded this building, but it was for local people to speak up for this facility and explain clearly why it was for everybody. She herself had spoken locally about this new project many times on her visits to Colchester.

In response to Councillor Young, Ms. Stark said that the negativity and message from some that it was a total waste of money, needed to be addressed with clarity around the regeneration needed. The partners understood what makes for successful regeneration and have a vision of what it will be like once complete, and it was vital that this is communicated to a wider audience. The St Botolph's Quarter was badly in need of regeneration, needing an anchor, to signal to the community that it was serious about regeneration. The bespoke building was a catalyst for attracting the right kind of developers to the regeneration area. Ms. Stark said the capital project would be completed and the partnership was very clear about how the project will perform and create the educational and economic benefits, and support of Firstsite was vital in getting the message across. Ultimately, proof will be when we open the doors to the public.

Ms. Stark agreed with Councillor Young that it was vital that all partners provide the right type of outreach, and her experience with previous arts projects was for the need in all cases for partners to give a massive effort to a bespoke programme to engage with all local people, and she was certain this approach would be adopted at Colchester. In response to Councillor

Maclean, Ms. Stark said once the fit out phase was complete, a series of representative group visits would be organised, targeting communities who have a big stake to play in its success. Community involvement was incredibly important prior to the civic opening.

Ms. Stark agreed with Councillor Cook that the partners had not promoted the new facility properly in terms of an educational facility as well as an arts facility, that this would be in the premier league of cultural activity, and she hoped Essex County Council would rise to the challenge of ensuring all local school children would visit the facility in the first twelve months of operation.

In regards to future funding, Ms. Stark confirmed to Councillor Arnold that generally the Government settlement to the Arts Council was for three years, hence their three year funding offers to their funded partners, given partners the ability to forward plan, vital in an area that requires bookings to be confirmed and worked upon for in many cases more than one year in advance. Some scenario planning is ongoing in regards to the 2010 election outcome, with partners needing to be open and mature in dialogue. That said the three local partners and the Council's Museum Service continue collaborative and mature dialogue to provide savings through for example, economies of scale, and it was vital that the partners continued to be smart about how they worked together in the future years.

Councillor Lucas addressed the panel, thanking them for the opportunity to speak. Councillor Lucas supported everything said by the three public speakers and Ms. Stark. For Essex County Council, arts and culture remained an important priority, with close links to heritage and tourism, all feeding into one another and providing economic growth.

Councillor Lucas said it was vital that arts and culture reached out to the young and those from disadvantaged groups who would otherwise never have cultural experiences, and this provided the knock-on benefit of reducing health inequalities. Grants from the public organisations supported this view in ensuring the facilities became available.

Councillor Lucas concluded by saying the partnership was striving to achieve benefits to local people, and if the end result is just one person becoming a contributor to the arts then this relatively small investment will have been worthwhile.

In response to Councillor Young, who asked how cuts in public spending relate to the arts, and how many tangible opportunities are given to disaffected local people by the three arts organisations, Councillor Lucas said he could assure Councillor Young that the County approach was first and foremost to try and make savings without the need to effect front-line services. Councillor Lucas

whilst recognising the economic downturn, and the public's negative perception to building a large expensive building in these times, said it was interesting by way of comparison to look at the investment in successful quality buildings built during the depression years. Creating this invested opportunity can provide other income investment streams. Councillor Lucas agreed to provide Councillor Young with examples of tangible opportunities given to disaffected local people.

In response to Councillor Willetts, Councillor Lucas said strong joint working enabled the strategic requirements of the partnership to be realised, with close liaison and working practices with officers, monitoring Service Level Agreements between all the partners, with regular meetings, regular contact. The agreements within the agenda papers were good examples of the County not dictating, but working as a partner.

Ms. Josie Worner addressed the panel to give greater clarification to the funding arrangements and agreements in place and as shown within the appendices to the report. Ms. Worner said what was now in place was a vast improvement to previous attempts, and would now form part of a Portfolio report and a transparent decision making process from 2010-11 onwards. Councillor Arnold endorsed what would for the future be a valuable opportunity for members to see what the Council gets for its investment, personally regarding the codifying as extremely important. Councillor Young concurred, saying the information provided the clarity previously not given, in what was expected from the Council's investment.

For clarity, Ms. Worner confirmed to members that the original agreements have been signed by the requisite signatories, and also that officers are aware of other partner's funding agreements, and what they are expecting to achieve. Every effort is made to ensure nothing on a funding agreement jeopardises or conflicts with other agreements.

The following representatives from the three funded organisations, namely Ms. Kath Wood and Mr. Wayne Warner (Firstsite), Mr. Anthony Roberts (Colchester Arts Centre) and Mr. Tony Casement (The Mercury Theatre) each gave a presentation on the delivery of arts and culture within their respective organisations.

The scope of the presentation was as follows;

- Working with Colchester Borough Council
- Delivery
- Achievement on Strategic Priorities

- Return on Investment
- External Direct Impacts
- Firstsite Overview
- Colchester Arts Centre Overview
- Mercury Theatre Overview
- The Future

Each of the venues work collaboratively with the Council to ensure the Council's Strategic Priorities is embraced within the delivery of the cultural offer. The priorities have been agreed within the service level agreement and are frequently measured against specific criteria with officers and the portfolio holder. The information within the SLAs is set out in line with the Council's Strategic Plan, conveying the way in which Colchester Borough Council's financial support is an effective and efficient way to deliver a broad range of services to meet local identified needs.

Colchester has a strong cultural scene that is one of the Borough's unique selling points and which makes a key contribution to realising the Council's vision that Colchester will continue to be a place where people want to live, work and visit. Collectively, the delivery will:

- Return greater investment to a wider local economy
- Support and develop jobs and new employment opportunities
- Develops creative and cultural industries
- Develops the stock of attractions, events and activities for residents and visitors
- Works with and in the community to provide the arts as a tool to enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors

The achievements on Strategic priorities included:

- Nearly 300 jobs created and maintained, with a local spend of £1,400,000.
- 1,030 community events with an attendance of 46,681
- 607 venue based events with an attendance of 157,700
- Delivery of a schools programme, youth advisory schemes and craft for

the Elderly.

- £1.7m levered through ACE, ECC and the University. £883k levered through trusts and foundations. £1.8m earned income and a commitment to undertaking a Fundamental Service Review.

Mr. Warner (FS) gave an overview of Community Outreach and Development including regeneration, Artists Professional Development, Slack Space, The Chinese Community and Cycle Colchester, Addressing younger and older people's needs including Art Stop Bus Stop, Squiggles and Giggles (Ormiston Centre) and Street Art Project, MA Contemporary Art and Professional Practice, the University Partnership and Schools Programme, and finally, their partnership with Tate Connects and Crochet.

Mr. Roberts (CAC) spoke about the centre's Community Outreach and Development programme, including Charity Frock Swap, BBC Book Swap, BBC Blast, The Farmers Market and the Beer Festival, explaining the diversity of the centre, as a venue for all genres of live and recorded music, poetry, Children's Theatre, Clubs, Dance, Comedy and Film Screening, a provider of education, outreach and partnerships with, for example, Variety Ball, Willow Brook School, Sir Charles Lucas Arts, The Music of Place.

Mr. Casement (MT) gave examples of individual people and programmes that had benefitted from the Theatre's Community Outreach and Development Programme.

Ms. Evans addressed the panel to thank the Council for both previous years funding and their continued funding. The MT was passionate about partnership working, mature conversations would continue. Ms. Evans said arts and culture is a jewel, inspiring people to achieve through creativity, life enhancing, not debilitating, and the MT continues to aspire to do as much as it can for all Colchester wards.

Ms. Evans showed a Guardian press release of the theatre's Romeo and Juliet production, taking the town's premiership theatre's reputation forward.

Councillor Young welcomed the community work undertaken by the three organisations but was surprised that a street art project was undertaken in the St Andrews ward without her knowledge. It was confirmed that the MT had been involved in projects at Greenstead for the past seven years and welcomed any opportunity to work closer with ward councillors. The current Greenstead project has been in progress for two years, for 7 – 10 year olds, developing the techniques around street art. Ms. Evans said she would welcome meeting Councillor Young and Councillor Dopson to explain and



develop the project.

Ms. Evans and Ms. Wood said a lot of work was needed to include local hotels within a package on arts and culture for visitors of Colchester, though conversation with the Red Lion and Marks Tey Hotels continues, that Mr. Roberts hoped would include on-line bookings.

Ms. Dee confirmed to Councillor Willetts that in terms of quantifying best value, statistics from other similar regional theatres suggests the community work of the MT outstrips the other organisations. Ms. Wood said as much as 40% of the community work of FS is done away from the building base and this benchmarks very favourably with other similar organisations.

Ms. Stark said the Arts Council hold comparatives for visual arts buildings, theatres and multi art form venues, and for Colchester the comparative was very good, with a huge amount of community activity going on. The partnership had well seasoned partners, who do their business extraordinary well, a strong partnership giving a strong resource base from which to generate best value.

In response to Councillor Arnold, Ms. Evans could not imagine how their community work would be done without their organisations. Ms. Wood said their partnership was strengthened by their ability to work across all different sectors, public and private, with Mr. Roberts saying it was a partnership built on integrity and that stood up against direct comparisons. It was unanimously agreed that the Visual Arts Facility would provide a fantastic opportunity to work together to enhance this facility

In response to Councillor Taylor, Ms. Evans said none of the partner organisations could survive without being populace, reinforced by Mr. Roberts who said they are commercial organisations who need to get the best deals, and attendance figures suggested all the venues are very popular. Ms. Wood said contemporary art was very popular with some, though their fundamental objective was to make contemporary art even more popular.

Mr. Grady (MT) addressed the panel to confirm to the panel quantitative information about attendance figures, and the breakdown of attendance by concessionary fares, attendance by the disabled, the young and family groups, confirming attendance is affordable and offers a wide and diverse range of live performance.

Ms. Tina Dopson, Portfolio Holder for Performance and Partnerships addressed the panel and thanked those present for their frankness and openness that needed to continue for the partnership to move forward. Ms. Dopson said she did not want the positive statements from the meeting to be lost after the meeting.

At the conclusion of the open discussions, Councillor Arnold thanked all the evening's speakers and contributors for taking time to attend and contribute to what was a constructive and useful experience, with a lot to take forward.

*RESOLVED* that:

- i) The panel commented on and noted the Council's investment in Colchester's major art venues, and the extent to which those venues contribute to the Council's strategic priorities.

## **56. Fundamental Service Review - Revenues and Benefits**

The following officers attended the meeting for this item;

Ms. Pam Donnelly, Executive Director

Mr. Charles Warboys, Head of Resource Management

Mr. Charles Warboys presented the report on the FSR of the Revenues and Benefits Service.

Mr. Warboys said this review, the third to be considered by the panel, did have some key differences from the previous reviews, primarily because the process was developing. Specifically the timescale for this review was much shorter, commencing at the beginning of November 2009 and there had been a dedicated project team, with officers from both Corporate Management and Resource Management undertaking an intensive review.

What was before the panel was a report for comment, which would then be presented to Cabinet on 17 March 2010, and though work continued on the detail within the report in regards to savings and staff structure, Mr. Warboys remained confident about the information being presented.

Mr. Warboys said the service was responsible for the management of Council Tax, Business Rates and Benefits claimants for which there was now 14,000, with the economic downturn realising not only an increase in caseload, but an increase in the volume of complex cases due to for example, an ever increasing number of claimants in part time employment.

The review had involved thorough consultation, internally with internal stakeholders and Unison, and with external organisations such as Family Mosaic, Citizen's Advice Bureau, Age Concern and key local social registered landlords, resulting in encouraging feedback.

Mr. Warboys spoke about the three core themes of the review, and emerging issues, saying the themes are ambitious, but can be achieved. The themes being;

How it works –improved customer journey and how the process works:

- Customer information
- More upfront
- Risk Assessment

Enabling the change – through ICT and cultural change

Service delivery model – internal refocus or external options

In response to Councillor Young, Mr. Warboys spoke of the shared services model mentioned within the report, explaining that there was continuous dialogue with other Essex authorities with a view to sharing a service or part service and that would reduce costs due to an economy of scale. That said, this was for the future, with Colchester's present aim to deliver a first class service ourselves, and if in the future we can demonstrate a five day turnaround in benefit claims, this will itself attract future business from other authorities. It was added that what shouldn't be ruled out was the possibility of another authority carrying out a service on Colchester's behalf. Ms. Donnelly added that the FSR process leads you to a point of real dialogue about the opportunity for shared services, putting us in good stead for being 'fit for purpose'.

In respect of benefit claimants and the need for personal contact or human intervention, Mr. Warboys confirmed to Councillor Willetts that the benefit claim process can be very complex and so there will always be a need for personal dialogue, especially when dealing with vulnerable people, and the Council will continue to offer a range of contacts and support to respond to all enquiries thereby balancing the needs for all claimants. What we will have in place is a structure that we believe will be needed for now and the immediate future, but will be reconsidered at the next stage of an ongoing process. Ms. Donnelly said the new service will be effective and efficient, that customers were consulted and showed a desire, especially vulnerable and new customers, victims of the economic downturn, for retaining personal communication as a really important requirement of the new service. Mr. Warboys confirmed that consultation had included visiting wards and providing two recent market stalls in Culver Street.

Mr. Warboys also confirmed that work was being done in conjunction with the Citizen's Advice Bureau and Registered Social Landlords to look at simplifying

customer letters. Ms. Donnelly said the intention was to improve the quality of information provided that would itself reduce the need for customer contact, and release any resource from this improvement to improving communication with harder to reach groups and individuals. Councillor Taylor had doubts about achieving what he believed to be a very ambitious target. In response, it was said that the new approach would require more visiting but would be complemented by a risk based approach that will require less information. Ms. Donnelly assured members of the robustness of the process, saying the review had revealed a significant scale of opportunities. Mr. Warboys said the structure put in place would mitigate against the potential impact of foreseeable changes to the benefit system.

In response to Councillor Cook, Ms. Donnelly said the estimated number of potentially avoidable contacts to the Revenues and Benefits service, 37,500 and 28,000 respectively, would be as a result of the new approach, where clearer details to potential customers at the outset would avoid the need for late and unnecessary contact. Mr. Warboys said a new service to be provided would be the on-line calculator that would allow potential claimants to input income information and allow for a quick track solution to claims, a filter system that would avoid those people who will not be entitled to benefit going through the application process. It was hoped this new service would be introduced in April / May 2010.

Councillor Arnold said he endorsed what he believed was a thorough review.

Ms. Donnelly confirmed that at the end of the planned programme of FSRs, an overview of progress on implementation would be undertaken.

Councillor Arnold said the panel's group spokespersons would consider the future review options at the next scheduled briefing.

*RESOLVED* that the panel reviewed and endorsed the Revenues and Benefits business case and the draft Cabinet report resulting from the FSR.

## **57. Work Programme**

*RESOLVED* that the panel agreed to defer the review of the work of the new Portfolio Holder for Business and Tourism until 2010-11, with business to be conducted at the final meeting on the 30 March 2010 being the review of the work of the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Diversity and the Arts.