

Minutes of: RESOURCE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Date of meeting: 15 April 2010

Present: Councillor T Holt (in the Chair);
Councillors, P Ashworth, R Baum, R C A Brown, J Harris,
K Rothwell, B Theckston and B Vincent

Co-opted Member: Mrs A Brown

Also in attendance: Councillor R Bibby – Leader of the Council
Dionne Brandon – Head of Improvement (Team Bury)
Karen Brockway – Lead Officer
Councillor M Connolly – Leader of the Second Largest
Political Group
Mike Kelly – Deputy Chief Executive
Steve Kenyon – Head of Strategic Finance
Amy Svensson – Improvement Advisor

Public in attendance: There were 12 Members of the public in attendance

Apologies for absence:

RPS.1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

RPS.2 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair informed members of the public that he would permit questions to be asked during consideration of RPS.4

RPS.3 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS CASEWORK – SERVICE IMPROVEMENT REVIEW

At the last meeting of the Resource and Performance Scrutiny Commission held on 23 March 2010, the Members requested that the Executive Director – Children’s Services and the Executive Member – Children and Young People attend the next meeting of the Commission to answer questions and discuss the concerns raised by the Commission in relation to SEN Casework.

It was explained that neither the Executive Director nor the Executive Member were available to attend the meeting of the Commission and therefore the item would be carried over to the next appropriate Scrutiny Meeting in the new Municipal Year.

Members of the Commission expressed their disappointment at the fact that the item could not be discussed at the meeting and asked for reassurance that it would be looked at by the relevant body as soon as practicable.

It was agreed:

That the comments of the Commission be noted.

RPS.4 CALLED – IN ITEM – SERVICE IMPROVEMENT REVIEW – CIVIC VENUES

The Scrutiny Commission considered a called-in decision of the Executive meeting held on 10 March 2010 in accordance with the Council Constitution.

The Executive made the following decision:

1. That with regard to the Longfield Suite, the Status Quo be retained with the proviso that an effective business plan is put in place to improve marketing, awareness, usage and income.
2. That these revised arrangements be operated over an agreed period of between 18-24 months and be reviewed after 12 months by the Council's Management Board.
3. That with regard to the Radcliffe Civic Suite, the Council pursue the opportunities for external management of the venue, which would begin by undertaking a 'market sounding' to assess alternative operating models, followed by a formal procurement process, if results suggest a workable model may be available.
4. That adoption of this option would have an agreed level of guaranteed community use.

A Call-In Notice was submitted by Councillors M Connolly, J Smith, A J Cummings, A Isherwood, S Costello, J Byrne, S Briggs and R Shori, for the following reasons:-

- The consultation process was flawed
- Why has Radcliffe Civic Suite been singled out for differential treatment from other Civic Venues?
- There is a lack of detail about the proposals for the arrangements for externalising the management of Radcliffe Civic Suite.
- There is a lack of any detail as to the position if the Council are unable to engage with an external management provider.
- There is a lack of guarantees of support for Radcliffe Civic Suite during the transition.

The Commission requested information at the meeting from:-

- Councillor B Bibby (Leader of the Council)
- Mr M Kelly (Deputy Chief Executive)

The following documents were submitted:

- The report considered by the Executive
- A copy of the User Survey

- An extract of the Executive Minute from the meeting held on 10 March 2010 relating to Service Improvement Review - Civic Venues
- A copy of the Call-In Notice

The Chair invited Councillor Connolly to address the meeting in relation to the Call-In Notice.

Councillor Connolly set out the concerns of the Members who had signed the Call-In Notice and asked for clarification in relation to the recommendations made by the Executive.

Councillor Connolly explained that he felt that the recommendations set out in the report of the Task and Finish Group had given Radcliffe Civic Suite no guarantees of future support and were vague as to the future options for the venue.

Councillor Bibby responded to the points that had been raised in the Call-In Notice as follows:-

- The consultation process had generated nearly 1400 completed surveys and there had been no complaints received during the consultation process
- All LAP Members had received a consultation pack, there had been a number of press releases and articles relating to the consultation process in local press. The consultation was available on line, in libraries and other authority buildings and in the venues themselves.
- The consultation process had also taken account of comments received in letters sent directly and in letters published in the local press, public meetings and petitions.
- For business planning purposes, each of the four Venues across the Borough was dealt with individually. Each venue operates differently and therefore requires different solutions.
- A market sounding exercise could be undertaken by early July and new management could be in place for the start of the 2011/2012 financial year.
- Early indications show that there will be expressions of interest into the management of the venue.
- Radcliffe Civic Suite has and will continue to receive support through any transition period.
- Cllr Bibby restated that the Radcliffe Civic Suite would never close while he was Leader of the Council.

Councillor Holt reported that in addition to the points raised on the Call-In Notice, a number of questions had been submitted in writing prior to the meeting, as follows:

Questioner	Question	Response
Ivan Lewis	Why are Bury not adopting the same in house improvement strategy for Radcliffe Civic Hall as the Longfields Suite?	The review of the Civic Venues was about securing individual solutions for each venue. Each venue operates in different parts of the borough and each has

		different opportunities to generate income and increase utilisation.
Ivan Lewis	What alternative options are Bury MBC considering if no p[ri]vate sector solution is found over the next few months?	Over the past months the Council has received a number of unsolicited expressions of interest in managing the venue. These need to be examined through a Market Sounding exercise.
Ivan Lewis	How much have the Council departments spent in the last three years on using external conference and meeting venues rather than Council facilities such as Radcliffe Civic Hall?	It was not possible to provide the information in detail due to its commercially sensitive nature, it was reported that some small use of external venues had been made, principally where Civic facilities were unavailable or not suitable
Ivan Lewis	How much has Bury MBC spent on marketing and promoting Radcliffe Civic Hall over the past three years and how does this compare to the marketing and promotion of other Council venues?	It was not possible to provide the information in detail due to its commercially sensitive nature, it was reported that in the three years up to and including 2008/2009, Bury Council had spent the most on individually promoting Radcliffe Civic Suite out of all the Civic venues.
Ivan Lewis	Can the Council guarantee that the Radcliffe Civic Suite Building will remain in Council ownership?	It was explained that it was anticipated that the Council would retain ownership of the venue opting for a medium to long term contract with agreed levels of capital investment.
Mr Ramsay	Radcliffe Civic Suite can offer the same Health and Well-being benefits as the Longfield Suite.	It was explained that all of the Civic Venues offer opportunities for residents to take part in various activities that contribute to health and well-being and there was nothing in the plans that would change or curtail that.
Mr Ramsay	The Task and Finish Group had stated that the Suite does not have a unique	Councillor Bibby reported that even with the features highlighted by Mr Ramsay

	selling point. Radcliffe Civic Suite is listed in the Pevsner Architectural Guide and is being considered for grade 2 listed building status, it is also set within its own green spaces.	the Civic Suite had consistently struggled to secure adequate utilisation over a number of years despite a range of marketing and promotional activities undertaken by the management. The proposal set out in the report of the Task and Finish Group is an attempt to inject new ideas, much needed new investment which would provide a sustainable future for the Suite.
Mr Ramsay	The report of the Task and Finish Group was directed to the Executive and bypassed the Scrutiny Panel. There is no mention of this in the decision making process set out in the Constitution.	A number of recommendations were made by the Resource and Performance Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 29 September 2009. The Executive determined that it would receive the final report back from the Task and Finish Group under its delegated powers.
Mr Ramsay	The Residents and Users Survey was not available in Braille or large print, no foreign language forms were available. The online version of the survey did not comply with current industry website design standards.	Council policy states that forms or documents in Braille, large print and foreign languages are available on request. Bury uses specific software to design online forms; the software is compliant with level "AA" of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

Councillor Holt thanked Mr Lewis and Mr Ramsay for their questions and asked if any other members of the public had questions to ask of Councillor Bibby.

There were no further questions asked by the public present at the meeting.

Councillor Holt invited questions and comments from the Members of the Council in attendance at the Meeting:-

Councillor Cummings stated that the Consultation had not been widely advertised and that forms were not replenished once they had run out. Councillor Cummings also explained that support for the Civic Suite had been high with a petition in respect of Radcliffe Civic Suite and the Longfield Suite gathering a total of 10,000 signatures.

Councillor Holt invited questions from the Members of the Resource and Performance Scrutiny Commission, and the following comments/responses were made:

- The word “closure” had not been used in respect of Radcliffe Civic Suite.
- It was not possible to disclose commercially sensitive information at this meeting but the Leader expressed confidence that the external management option would be successful.
- The lack of usage for Radcliffe Civic Suite had to be addressed. Particular reference was made to the small number of people using the bar area and how this could be improved. The view was also expressed that usage in other civic venues was on the low side but different options had been agreed.

Councillor Holt thanked all those present at the meeting for their attendance.

Delegated decision:

That the Resource and Performance Scrutiny Commission refer the Notice, without comment to the Council.

COUNCILLOR T HOLT
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 9.05pm).