

TO: EXECUTIVE
18 NOVEMBER 2014

RESPONSE TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORT ON 'A REVIEW OF CULTURAL SERVICES'

Director of Environment, Culture and Communities

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To determine the Executive's response to the recommendations in the report by a working group of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel entitled 'A Review of Cultural Services'.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **That the Executive commend the working group for the review it conducted and the helpful report it produced: and,**
- 2.2 **The Executive endorse the proposed response to the working group report as set out in section 5 of this report.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 As set out in section 5 of this report.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The Executive may wish to consider an alternative response to that outlined in section 5.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 The working group concludes that 'the Council provides and facilitates the delivery of a range of valuable cultural services in Bracknell Forest, commensurate with the resources available for that. These services are used and enjoyed by many residents and give good value for money'.
- 5.2 The working group have made a range of recommendations to the Executive and these are replicated below with the Director's suggested response shown in italics. The Executive may note that the working group has adopted an aspirational approach to the future development of cultural services and while the vast majority of the responses are positive, they better reflect the financial parameters within which the Council must work and the national context as a whole.

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Libraries

- 5.3 To devise a clear vision for the Library service of the future, updating the 1998 version.

Agreed. By the end of this year an updated vision will be agreed with the Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection and reported to the Executive.

- 5.4 To review the scope for further income generating activities for libraries in the light of the Arts Council guidance, once it becomes available.

Agreed. The report has recently been published, called 'Income generation for Public Libraries: A practical guide for library service commissioners and providers in England'.

The libraries management team will carefully review this 38 page report to consider any points made.

- 5.5 To encourage all Council departments to consider how they might use the valuable network of community libraries to publicise and deliver their departmental services

Agreed. This is an excellent observation and reinforces the point made immediately above. Although the existing library network is utilised for corporate projects, for example, issuing of e+ cards, issuing bus passes, issuing green waste bags, there is significant further scope to increase the range of services offered from libraries. As noted above, this could extend for example to police points, services for business start ups, etc.

The library management team will circulate details of all libraries e.g. size, locations, meeting rooms, opening hours etc. to all Directors and ask DMTs to consider and cascade as necessary.

Cultural offering in the regenerated Bracknell town centre

- 5.6 Complementary to the regeneration, the Executive Member for Economic Development and Regeneration should ensure that:

- there is good signage welcoming people to the Borough, conveying the sense of newness;

Agreed. There is an emerging high level plan for town centre signage and this idea could be considered as part of that process.

- there is some public art at the bus station, perhaps a statue or decorating the ends of the bus shelters;

Partially agreed (subject to funding). Similar to above as detailed planning for the regenerated Bracknell Town Centre takes shape public art will be one of the many considerations.

Obviously funding will be required and the most likely source will be S106. In the event funding was identified it would be our intention to involve partners such as South Hill Park.

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In terms of location there is currently planned to be a 'Pocket Park' adjacent to the bus station and this may be a location that should also be considered for any potential public art.

- there is promotion of the Borough as a whole, involving the Town and Parish councils.

Agreed. Members will be aware that The Look Out is the Tourist Information Point for the Borough. We currently produce an accommodation guide but promotion of the Borough as a whole in terms of a destination is currently limited. However, specific services such as Coral Reef and The Look Out do promote themselves (and therefore the Borough indirectly) on a regional basis. The Head of Communications will review options for a more holistic approach, linking with the new economic development activity, to support tourism.

South Hill Park

- 5.7 To encourage all councillors who are not familiar with South Hill Park to visit it, and talk to the people who work there, to build awareness and understanding.

Agreed. South Hill Park Trust (SHPT) will be encouraged to make regular contact with all councillors. This could include asking them to provide copies of their regular brochure which publishes their programme to Democratic Services who in turn could forward these to councillors.

- 5.8 To ask South Hill Park Trust (SHPT) to conduct periodic surveys of what existing and potential customers want from the venue.

Agreed. This will form part of the partnership agreement between Bracknell Forest Council and SHPT.

- 5.9 To ask SHPT to submit a bid including the minimum core grant they need to remain in existence, together with a range of additional optional bids for the various arts activities they propose running.

Partially agreed. The Council has a robust relationship with SHPT that is built on trust and transparency. We do not discourage SHPT from making proposals and previous ad-hoc partnerships have produced some excellent events enjoyed by the public. Through the grant process SHPT can make additional bids, but for transparency they will continue to be given guidelines about what the Council is likely to be prepared to grant which will be based on the economic position the Council finds itself in.

- 5.10 To explore the possibility of issuing a side letter to the lease with SHPT. This could make it clear that SHPT retain the responsibility under the lease for repairs and maintenance. It could also acknowledge that the Council may decide of its own volition, and without making any future commitment, to provide certain expert advice, repairs and maintenance to SHP land and buildings, at no charge to the Trust. We also recommend that this revised approach is informed by a fresh reappraisal of the SHP estate, its condition, maintenance costs, and usage.

Not agreed. The relationship between Bracknell Forest Council and SHPT is defined through the property lease for the mansion and grounds, together with the Annual Partnership Agreement. This defines the responsibilities of both parties relating to property matters.

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The current practice is for Construction and Maintenance to issue a letter confirming work carried out by BFC is under licence with the permission of SHPT but no acceptance of the responsibility is transferred from the lessee to the lessor.

Periodic building condition surveys are already routinely carried out by the Council. More detailed/comprehensive surveying could be carried out but would obviously require additional resource. This could be beneficial if SHPT were committed to obtaining external grant aid to help support the building.

- 5.11 That a publicity strategy for SHP is drawn up and actioned by the Council, working with SHPT and Bracknell Regeneration Partnership.

Not agreed. SHPT is an independent organisation employing marketing staff and the SHPT Board should retain full responsibility. There may be opportunities which could be explored of SHPT making better use of the Council's assets, but the Council does not have sufficient resources, in addition to the significant financial support already given to SHPT, to action a publicity strategy for South Hill Park Arts Centre.

- 5.12 To encourage SHPT to take an initiative to increase income from bequests, perhaps by enlisting the interest and support of local firms of solicitors, and learning from successful charities how best to approach this sensitive issue.

Agreed. It is understood that this is already undertaken and SHPT currently report this activity in their grant aid.

- 5.13 That the Executive Member for Transport gives consideration as to the viability of provision of transport including the possibility of a community bus....., to and from SHP particularly in the evenings

Agreed. There has been ongoing discussions with SHPT to support them in any application they may wish to make to local commercial bus companies for the provision of bus services to the Arts Centre.

Cultural Activities in the Voluntary Sector

- 5.14 To take every opportunity to both promote the take-up of the wide range of cultural pursuits, and to commend everyone in the voluntary sector who invests their time and skills in running these cultural activities for the benefit and wellbeing of the whole community. This should be recognised in a more comprehensive Cultural Statement, which should not be limited to the Council's direct activities.

Partially agreed. The Council plans to develop an online events diary which can be used to promote voluntary sector cultural events in the borough. Involve (formerly BFVA) can also promote events through their website and e-newsletters.

It may be possible to recognise those heavily involved in delivering cultural pursuits in the voluntary sector through the Bracknell Pride Awards Scheme.

As regards the Cultural Statement, the previous Cultural Strategy was comprehensive and did its best to include a range of partners. This included an ongoing partnership to deliver the myriad of actions proposed as part of the initial strategy.

Members will be acutely aware that priorities in Leisure and Culture have changed during the previous five years and areas of work such as arts development are now

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provided through others. Current resources available would preclude the delivery of a similar strategy.

On this basis the Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection has determined that a strategy should be replaced by a more focused delivery plan relating to those services currently delivered by the Council's Leisure and Culture Division.

- 5.15 To consider supporting a low-cost alternative to a museum, perhaps by facilitating the temporary, rent-free use of a vacant retail unit or other suitable space by the voluntary sector to display artefacts and other material illustrating and celebrating Bracknell Forest's unique history and culture.

Not agreed. Due to previous decisions based on budgets to reduce culture related staff in heritage and arts there is simply no resource to provide support. This low cost alternative is likely to deliver very short term interest since heritage displays need to be constantly refreshed to maintain a community interest. To provide a museum service of any merit would require an annual revenue budget in the region of £300 - £500k per annum and this is considered wholly unrealistic in the current economic climate.

Promotion of Cultural Activities and Promotion

- 5.16 The Council's A-Z listing should include a culture heading, containing for example links to SHP and other websites, and the list of cultural activities referred to

Agreed. On the home page of the BFC website it is possible to use the A-Z listing to access South Hill Park web page. From the landing page for leisure and culture it is possible to utilise the A-Z of sports to access a range of information on local sports clubs.

- 5.17 Rather than be confined to an adult social care audience, the very helpful source of information in i-Hub is replicated as a principal 'signposting to cultural services' both on the Cultural activities Council's main website and in hard copy format in libraries and other suitable locations.

Agreed. It is anticipated that by end of February 2015 there will be an ability for community groups to record events on the Council's emerging "all services hub" which will also include information on SEN, Family Information Services and an updated i-hub.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 Nothing to add to the report.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 There is no current budget provision to support any new initiatives. If any new schemes or projects are proposed in the future a report will be sent to the Executive which will detail any financial implications of implementing the scheme or project.

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Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 There are a range of equality impact assessment screening which cover the full range of services delivered by the Leisure and Culture Division of Bracknell Forest Council.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 None associated directly with this report.

7 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

- 7.1 A range of voluntary groups were consulted by the Members who produced this report.

Method of Consultation

- 7.2 Members of the working group met with some voluntary groups.

Representations Received

- 7.3 These have been incorporate into their report.

Background Papers

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Member working group.

Contact for further information

Vincent Paliczka, Environment, Culture and Communities Department - 01344 351750

Vincent.paliczka@bracknell-forest.gov.uk