

**Cultural Services – Year End Service Plan Review (March 2017)**

**Leisure Development Programme** - Following Executive approval in November 2015 the Leisure Development Programme has progressed largely on schedule. Procurement of an external partner to manage the Council's leisure facilities is nearing completion. The operator will be confirmed on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2017 and the contract will commence on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2017. Approval was granted for the investment proposals by Full Council on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2016. Construction work, being undertaken by our contractor Speller Metcalfe, commenced at St Nicholas Park and Newbold Comyn leisure centres in January 2017.

Initial scoping and feasibility work on Phase II of the investment proposals (Kenilworth) has commenced. A confidential briefing/consultation took place with Kenilworth Town Council at the end of July 2016 to gather views on any "non-starters" or local issues that needed to be considered. Car parking is a key consideration in developing any viable plans for Kenilworth and therefore a piece of work has been carried out to understand where extra car parking could be located to serve both Abbey Fields and Castle Farm, and the capacity of such parking; this in turn will then inform the options that officers bring to members as the project progresses. Further reports will be brought to the Executive in the coming months to agree a project plan and outline budgets for Phase II. Any proposals for Phase II will be developed in partnership with the leisure operator but ultimately any decision on the nature of the proposals will be a decision for the Council.

Ongoing communications have been undertaken with leisure centre based staff to ensure that they remain up to date on the process to appoint an external partner, and the impact on their employment. The trade unions are fully engaged with the process and are party to these staff briefings.

Alongside the procurement of the management and construction contracts for this work, a review has been undertaken of the staffing structure required within the Sports & Leisure team in Cultural Services. The new small "client" team will manage the leisure centre and golf contracts, deliver the active communities and outdoor sports services, and lead on the strategic partnerships that are so vital to ensuring that local residents have the best possible opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity in the future. This new structure was approved by Employment Committee in December 2016 and went live in February 2017.

**Arts Review** – As scheduled in the FFF Programme a review commenced in April 2016 to consider an alternative staffing structure to deliver the "Arts" elements of the service area. This includes the Art Gallery & Museum at the Royal Pump Rooms, the Royal Spa Centre, Town Hall and the Arts Development service. This review was preceded by the completion of a review of the Council's Arts Strategy and the refocusing of the objectives for the service. The revised Arts Strategy has been a key document in informing the direction of the service and the consequent proposals for merging the Art Gallery and Museum with the "entertainment" elements of the service. The new structure was approved by the Employment Committee in December 2016 and went live in February 2017.

**Strategic projects** – the team have continued to work throughout the year with partners to progress a number of strategic projects including:

- Kenilworth Wardens relocation to Castle Farm subject to the outcome of the Local Plan and the development of Wardens current site at Thickthorn.
- Europa Way and the delivery of a community stadium in partnership with Leamington FC.

**Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum** - the Art Gallery & Museum continues to be a popular destination for local people and visitors alike attracting over 120,000 visitors a year. Indications are that attendances in 2016/17 have been slightly lower than the previous year. Events of particular note during the year have included Museums at Night: The Roaring Twenties. There have been three temporary exhibitions with a strong local focus, Through the Shop Window (Jan - April), Simon Lewty: The Significance of Writing (April - July) and Concealment & Deception: The Art of the Camoufleurs of Leamington Spa 1939-1945 ( July – Oct) in addition to the touring exhibition “Journey Through Japan” (Jan – April 2017)

**Visitor Information Centre (Royal Pump Rooms)** – the Executive agreed in January 2017 for the management of the VIC to transfer back to Warwick District Council, and become part of the newly created Arts team. This will allow greater integration of the services offered by the VIC, the Royal Pump Rooms/Art Gallery, and the Box Office. The VIC will be able to open for longer hours, and the intention will be to manage the VIC in such a way that ticket sales for the Royal Spa Centre, and other arts organisations who choose to use the services offered by the team, thus reducing the overall subsidy of the Arts service.

**Arts Development** – the service continues to support a wide range of arts projects ranging from national arts organisations based in the district (eg Motionhouse and Armonico) to local community arts groups. The service also provides professional support for these organisations and small scale financial support through the Arts Grants scheme. Highlights of the current year include the Arts Active project being delivered in a number of primary schools in partnership with Warwick Arts Centre, Poetry Voices, the growth of Motionhouse Youth, and the ongoing support of local artistic activities through the Arts Grants scheme.

**Royal Spa Centre** - the venue has enjoyed a successful year attracting over 93,000 visitors in 2016/17 and including one of the most financially successful pantomime seasons ever, with over 22,000 people attending and attracting some of the best feedback ever received. Income from the pantomime increased by £40,000 (13% increase on the previous year) for the 2016 show, a tremendous achievement and credit to the whole Spa Centre team.

During 2016/17, the Spa Centre team delivered a successful Spring season with a significant increase in attendance and box office income. This has been due to a diversification of the programme-comedians and lecturers proving to be especially popular. There have been many sold out performances, including the Ukulele Orchestra, Eddie Izzard, Talon, That’ll be The Day, An Audience with Ian Waite and Natalie Lowe (Strictly Come Dancing), Rob Beckett (comedian) and Jimmy Carr). As a result over 7,000 more people purchased tickets for events at the Spa Centre compared to the same period last year.

The cinema continues to perform well. The live screenings have been particularly well attended (Bolshoi Ballet, National Theatre Live, Glyndebourne and the 'Discover Arts' series (which included a live screening of a performance by Andre Rieu). This season also saw increased use of the cinema by community groups to screen specialist films, with the Polish community showing Polish language films and the Indian community screening Bollywood films.

The venue hosted 105 community events in the year which were equally successful – some of the performances of note were a spectacular production of Singing in the Rain by Leamington & Warwick Musical Society, the Warwickshire Book Awards and the Multi Cultural Showcase.

During the summer closure, essential maintenance works were undertaken including the installation of new stage lighting dimmers and stage motors which are essential to the safe and professional operation of the venue. Whilst the benefits of these systems will not be immediately obvious to the public, the investment significantly reduces the business risk to the venue and the equipment installed is the first of its kind in a venue of our size in the UK, future proofing the operation for years to come. New carpets and foyer furniture have also added to the overall standard of the venue which we believe will translate into increased ticket sales in the coming year.

**Leisure Centres** – whilst the Leisure Development Programme has been progressing, the teams at the leisure centres have been continuing to provide quality sports and leisure services across the Councils facilities. Income targets were adjusted to take into account the closures at Newbold Comyn and St Nicholas Park leisure centres. Indications in mid February, are that the revised income targets will be achieved by the end of March 2017. During the year up to January when Newbold Comyn Leisure Centre closed for the construction works, and the pool at St Nicholas Park also closed for the same reason, the focus was on actions to maximise income and control expenditure. In the lead up to the closures, the team focussed on minimising the inconvenience to customers by processing requests for cancellations or changes to memberships in a professional and effective manner. This put a great deal of pressure on the team at the same time as changes to roles within the team. There is a positive message that needs to be repeated for the community relating to the investment proposals and we have a detailed communications plan ensure that this continues during the building phase to ensure that we have the best possible public response when the refurbishment work is complete in late 2017.

Active communities work continues across the district with support for local communities and sports clubs to encourage residents to participate in active lifestyles. Sports England released the results of the new Active Lives Survey which shows this district to be very "active" and by far the most active in the sub-region. 75% of the adult population are considered to be active (ie take part in over 150 mins of activity a week). This is a tremendous result and evidence of the wide range of opportunities available and the vibrant local club and voluntary sector.

### **Looking ahead and Strategic Plans**

There are 2 key areas that will have a significant impact on the future shape of this service.

**The Leisure Development Programme** with its various strands will mean that the Council's sports and leisure service look very different within 2 years. Members have taken some bold decisions to date which mean that we now have an exciting opportunity to improve our facilities, make them

appropriate for the growing population of the district, and protect the provision of sports and leisure in the district for the next 30 years or so. We are looking to invest significant sums to achieve this, but any decision needs to be taken in the knowledge that these changes will result in an increase in participation, improved health and well being of local people, and a reduction in the subsidy from the Council to continue to provide these services.

The second key area is the ongoing debate around the **future use of our assets**. The Royal Pump Rooms and Town Hall are challenging assets to maintain, and are therefore costly for the Council to retain. Decisions around their future use will have a significant impact on the delivery of our Arts and Heritage service, and to the role of the Town Hall. The decision to progress the new Council HQ has provided some clarity around the future civic demands on the Town Hall and work is progressing to consider alternative uses for this asset. The future of the Royal Pump Rooms is linked to decisions made on the Creative Quarter project. Related to this project is the decision taken to bring the management of the Visitor Information Centre back in house to Warwick District Council from 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017, and the decision to extend the catering contract at the Royal Pump Rooms and Jephson Gardens for a period of time in accordance with the terms of the contract.