

Cultural Services – Portfolio Holder Update (Aug 2017)

Service Plan Performance 2017/18 – July update

1. Leisure Development Programme

External operator – Following a comprehensive OJEU procurement process, the Council appointed Sports and Leisure Management Ltd/Everyone Active (EA) to manage the Council’s leisure facilities. The contract commenced on 3rd June 2017 and as reported to O&S on 25th July, the contract is progressing well with a smooth handover achieved and very little negative feedback from customers or members of staff.

Eighty members of staff transferred from the Council to EA on 1st June. In the lead up to the transfer and since, these staff have benefitted from a comprehensive training programme to introduce them to EA ways of working. A number of staff have recently applied for and been successful in being appointed to new more senior roles within this contract.

EA have been working closely with WDC officers to ensure that preparations for the re-opening of Phase I of Newbold Comyn and St Nicholas Park leisure centres are underway and communications to all customers and stakeholders are as comprehensive as possible prior to the re-opening.

Construction projects (Newbold Comyn and St Nicholas Park) – as reported to all Councillors in May 2017, both projects have experienced delays as a result of unforeseen problems with infrastructure which were outside of the control of the Project team. Group Leaders and the Leisure Development Working Group were briefed on the detail of these difficulties, but Members will appreciate that until the Council’s litigation lawyers have concluded their consideration of the matter it would not be appropriate to share the full details beyond this small group of Councillors.

There are financial implications to these delays which are being reported as part of the Budget report being taken to the Executive at this cycle. These include payments to the construction contractor who have been unable to complete the construction due to the infrastructure issues, and also to EA who are able to claim for loss of income under the terms of the contract.

WDC officers and Everyone Active have been working closely with Mace Ltd (Project Managers) and Speller Metcalfe (construction contractors) to get Phase I of the 2 leisure centres ready for re-opening to the public. Newbold Comyn Leisure Centre is due to re-open w/c 21st August with the swimming pool, new 100 station gym, 2 of the 3 fitness studios, and new “dryside” changing rooms available. The new “village changing rooms” will not be available until Phase II of the works (Spring 2018) and therefore some temporary changing provision is being provided to supplement the “dryside” changing rooms. It is recognised that this is not an ideal situation but allows the pool to be re-open for customers as soon as possible. EA are currently in the throes of mobilising the staff and facilities in advance of re-opening.

St Nicholas Park Leisure Centre swimming pool will re-open in mid September along with the new village changing facilities and redecorated sports hall. The gym and new studios at this site will be completed and open in Spring 2018.

A timeline for work on Phase II of the Leisure Development Programme (Kenilworth) has been agreed and will be reported to Members in September.

Alongside the procurement of the management and construction contracts for this work, a review was been undertaken of the staffing structure required to 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 has been in place since January 2017, with the final post of Contract Officer joining the team in April 2017 ahead of the start of the EA contract.

2. Arts Review and integration of Visitor Information Centre

The Arts review was approved by Employment Committee and the Executive in December 2016 and the new team structure was implemented in February 2017. The new integrated Arts team is now well embedded and the teams are working effectively across the 3 venues (Royal Pump Rooms, Royal Spa Centre and Town Hall). In January 2017 members approved the return of the Visitor Information service, previously run by Warwick Town Council, to Warwick District Council. A review has been underway in recent months to bring the Visitor Information (VIC) team into the Arts team, with a report coming to the Employment Committee in September to confirm the new structure. Alongside the integration of the team, plans are being developed to refresh the concourse to the Royal Pump Rooms and make the services in that venue more coordinated and visible for customers. The Executive approved the funding for this project in July and work shall begin from September onwards, once the new team that will work in that area is in place.

3. Other Strategic projects – the team continue to work 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.

Service Delivery:

Art Gallery & Museum - the Art Gallery & Museum continues to be a popular destination for local people and visitors alike with over 138,700 visitors in 2016/17. The first 6 months of this year suggest that attendance figures have risen again. Highlights since April have included the biennial OPEN exhibition for which submissions of work were invited from professional artists based in the West Midlands. A panel of external judges selected the works to be displayed during the exhibition which took place between 13 April to 25 June 2017. The two winners, Nicola Durrant and Wendy Campbell-Briggs, split the £1,000 prize. Visitors to the exhibition were also given the chance to vote for their favourite artwork, with a prize of £500 on offer. Annabel Rainbow won this award with her quilt 'Self Portrait in the Third Person'. This exhibition attracts a lot of attention from across the Midlands region and helps to raise the profile of the gallery in the sector.

The current exhibition, 'Drawn from Life: People on Paper', runs until 17th September and is already proving to be one of the most popular for a number of years. It is touring exhibition showing items from the Arts Council Collection, including work by some of the biggest names in 20th and 21st

century British art, including David Hockney, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and LS Lowry. This exhibition provides local residents with the opportunity to view works by major artists which they would otherwise have to travel large distances to access.

Arts Development – the service, now integrated into the “Collections and Engagement team” within the Arts team, 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 provides professional support for these organisations, small scale financial support through the Arts Grants scheme, and advocacy for the role of “the Arts” and how it can make a significant contribution to the quality of life for local residents. Highlights of the current year include the planning and delivery of the “SPLAT” an arts event planned, managed and delivered for young people that took place in the Jephson Gardens in July as a result of the Arts Active project involving a number of primary schools in partnership with Warwick Arts Centre.

Royal Spa Centre - the venue attracted over 102,800 visitors in 2016/17 and enjoyed the most financially successful pantomime seasons ever, with over 22,700 people attending Beauty & The Beast and attracting some of the best feedback ever received. As a result advance sales for this year’s pantomime (Sleeping Beauty) are already higher than ever before. The team have begun to build on the success of last year and have concentrated on reaching new audiences through targeted marketing, The cinema continues to perform well with the live screenings from the RSC, Australian Ballet, and the National Theatre attracting large audiences. The venue hosted 41 community events between April and July, which have been equally successful. Some of the performances of note were the musical Legally Blonde (Leamington & Warwick Musical Society), Fiery Feet’s annual dance showcase, the Punjabi Concert and the Warwickshire Book Awards. Attendance for the weekly ‘Senior Citizens Activity Group’ is also growing. There have been several sell-out performances already this year including Pasha Kovalev, That’ll Be The Day, Reginald D Hunter, Ian Waite & Natalie Lowe and Juan Martin’s Arte Flamenco Puro.

Both the Art Gallery and Museum and the Royal Spa Centre have recently been awarded the TripAdvisor Certificate of excellence (for the third year running), which reflects the hard work of the teams and their focus on improving the customer experience. In 2016/17 the Royal Spa Centre achieved a 78% positive feedback rate.

Leisure Centres – the teams at the leisure centres worked hard leading up to the handover to Everyone Active to provide quality sports and leisure services across the Councils facilities. This was a challenging time for the teams with the uncertainty associated with the handover, and with the temporary closure of some of the leisure facilities while construction work was underway. Despite the closures, attendances at the leisure centres that remained open were strong, and many of the customers from Newbold Comyn Leisure Centre made use of St Nicholas Park and Castle Farm gyms and Abbey Fields pool.

Active Communities/ Sports Development - The Active Communities officer continues to develop opportunities to increase participation and support local club’s and group’s in the district. Recent allocation of Sport and Physical Activity Grants have included awards to Sydenham Neighbourhood Initiative funded to deliver sports sessions for young people in their local park, Brunswick Healthy Living Centre funded to deliver sequence dance for adults aged 55+ and Warwickshire Racial Equality Partnership funded to deliver physical activity sessions for BME women in the district in partnership

with the local Sri Krishna Ladies Group. Grants were also made for summer holiday coaching activities for young people at Lillington Youth Centre and funding to local sports clubs to increase memberships, purchase equipment and training of local volunteers. Subsidised sports play activities have been provided in Whitnash, Warwick Gates, Barford and Bubbenhall. A contribution was made to the Central Warwickshire School Sports Partnership to support the local School Games competitions that have taken place across school in the district, resulting in local representation at the Coventry Solihull & Warwickshire School Games Finals at The University of Warwick in July 2017.

Risk Management

The key service risks are currently considered to be:

Building risks at Royal Pump Rooms – flood risk and roof leaks continue to be a concern at this venue. Housing and Property Services are aware of the roof leaks and are developing a strategy that can be implemented once the long term future of the building has been confirmed. Periods of heightened flood risks are managed through the implementation of emergency flood protection procedures. The possibility of protecting the art collection from flood risk by creating a store at another suitable property continues to be investigated. In the meantime the flood barriers, which would prevent flood water entering the stores and gallery spaces, have recently been replaced.

Plant Failure – this risk has significantly reduced as a result of investment in the dimmers and motors at the Royal Spa Centre and the transfer of the leisure centres to Everyone Active (along with the risks associated with plant and machinery).

Golf Contract – Dialogue with the golf contractor in the last 12 months has resulted in a greater confidence in the long term future of the golf course. Robust contract management procedures are now embedded with regular monthly contract meetings.

The latest Cultural Services Risk Register is being reported to F&A Scrutiny in February 2018.

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 is now well underway and by Spring 2018 will have resulted in the district having 2 modern and extensive leisure centres in Newbold Comyn Leisure Centre and St Nicholas Park Leisure Centre that will 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. The award of the management contract to Everyone Active has meant that the leisure centres no longer require a subsidy from the Council, and averaged out over the 10 years of the contract, Everyone Active will be paying the Council £767,347 pa. There will be additional savings of approx. £328,000 generated through a reduction in support service costs.

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, but the recent decisions about the refreshing of the concourse area and the 12 month extension of the Kudos catering contract were taken in the context of the Creative Quarter project.

In the meantime work is ongoing across the service to respond to the following key drivers:

Income generation:

The box office income at the Royal Spa Centre continues to over perform. The 2016/17 programme was particularly popular as the variety of performances was diversified. The annual pantomime continues to be a crucial income stream – accounting for 27% of all tickets sold. Efforts to attract headline comedy acts to Leamington continue, as stand-up comedy creates the largest financial return. The annual Comedy Festival has helped to build positive relationships with the larger comedy promoters. However, it is the variety of the programme that will ensure that audiences continue to purchase tickets and income continues to increase - which includes the cinema and community hires. The decision to relocate the box office to the Royal Pump Rooms was made on the basis that the increased footfall will benefit sales generally. However, it also strengthens the business case for the box office acting as a central box office agency for the District – as the Royal Pump Rooms is a prominent location and has an annual footfall of over 500,000. It is the intention to proactively approach organisations and venues within the District to provide a box office solution. This will increase that revenue stream, but also strengthen the Arts section’s marketing ability and widen the exposure of our own events.

The integration of the box office and information service offers the opportunity to better promote the performances, screenings and events of the arts section as well as the District and the wide range of activities taking place. This is a central element of the Arts section’s marketing strategy.

Service Improvement:

Managers continue to focus on the development of an improved “Customer service” culture in all our facilities, providing staff with the skills to improve the customer experience and make them more likely to return.

Clear performance targets for teams are being developed which will contribute to the overall quality of service delivery.

There has been a growth of community engagement activities at the Art Gallery & Museum with notable partnerships with ILEAP and the NHS (arts therapy).

Cllr Michael Coker (Portfolio Holder for Culture)

August 2017