

Scrutiny Committee - 12 December 2018

Present: Councillor S Coles (Chairman)

Councillors N Cavill, E Gaines, T Hall, R Lees, L Lisgo, N Townsend, S Lees (In place of R Henley), H Prior-Sankey (In place of F Smith-Roberts) and R Ryan (In place of J Blatchford)

Officers: Mrs Val Hammond, Mrs Vanessa Lefrancois, Richard Doyle, Marcus Prouse and Clare Rendell

Also Present: Councillor I Morrell

(The meeting commenced at 6.20 pm)

35. **Apologies.**

Apologies were received from Councillors J Blatchford, R Henley, S Martin-Scott and F Smith-Roberts.

36. **Minutes of the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Committee**

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 13 November 2018 were taken as read and were signed.

37. **Declarations of Interest.**

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Member or Clerk of County, Parish or Town Council or any other Local Authority:

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr N Cavill	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr E Gaines	All Items	Wiveliscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Prior-Sankey	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr N Townsend	All Items	Kingston St Mary	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Councillor E Gaines further declared a personal interest as a founder Member of the Taunton Theatre Association and volunteered at the cinema in the Brewhouse.

Councillor N Cavill further declared a personal interest as a Member on the Brewhouse Board for Taunton Deane Borough Council.

38. **Brewhouse Update**

Considered the verbal update presented by The Chief Executive, Mrs Vanessa Lefrancois and the Chair of Trustees, Mrs Val Hammond from the Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre.

The update highlighted the achievements that had been delivered in 2018-19, which included the Brewhouse's 40th Anniversary projects:-

- Artist's commissions and support for artists developing visual and performance art;
- Full community and participation programme;
- Popular cinema and live theatre events which included BBC Singers Concert presented on BBC Radio 3;
- Family Friendly status, work experience, traineeships and Young Friends' Scheme; and
- Brewhouse Friends Scheme, improvements on the front of house areas e.g. handrails in auditorium.

The 2018 positive news stories were:-

- Continued growth for the first six months of 2018-19, attendances had increased by 25% and income generated by 26%. That demonstrated demand and a good balance within the programme.
- Taunton Theatre Association received a visit from Jeremy Wright MP, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. They had also received a visit by the Chief Executive of Arts Council England, Darren Henley. Both were full of praise for the growth and development of the Brewhouse.
- Braziers Coffee Roasting specialists opened the café on 1 December 2018 with Head Chef Steven Kieren formerly owner and chef of Silvers Pantry.
- Anne Frank exhibition with an emphasis on creative writing by young people, conflict and prejudice today.
- The third successive successful Christmas production with sales up 12% on last year.

A terrific theatre and dynamic varied cultural programme came with a cost. Despite all their hard work, a tiny team and many volunteer hours, they could not deliver a profitable enterprise within the current scale of auditorium and facilities. That was why they were working so hard to realise the Brewhouse's long overdue development. They were desperate for more seats, larger studios and better facilities to generate income in order to sustain the level of excellent arts provision and cultural experience.

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Members thanked the Chief Executive and her staff for all their hard work.
- Members highlighted that it was good to see that donations to the theatre had doubled and that the majority of income had increased apart from income from grants.

The Chief Executive from the Arts Council had visited the Brewhouse and spoke highly about the arts programmes and cultural activities that had been organised at the Brewhouse but they still struggled with grant allocations.

- Members requested further detail on the Community and Participation Programme.
Further details would be distributed to the Committee.
- Concern was raised on the loss of parking in the Coal Orchard car park and whether that would have an impact on the Brewhouse.
The Chief Executive and Chair of Trustees had worked on the assumption that more parking would be provided on the Firepool development site, but now that was not going ahead, there was concern for their patrons and where they could park and safely walk to and from the theatre.
- Members suggested that the access to Canon Street car park could be improved.
The Chief Executive agreed, however, they did not have the jurisdiction over the public footpaths so could not carry out the necessary works required to improve the route.
- Members were surprised about the concern on parking as there were several car parks located near the theatre.
Unfortunately the routes to and from the car parks were not suitable for many patrons due to the uneven surfaces and poor lighting, especially for those who had attended evening performances.
- Members suggested that the Chief Executive could approach the Somerset County Council (SCC) and request they improve the access to the car parks.
The Chief Executive and Chair of Trustees agreed but highlighted that the whole transport infrastructure needed improvement.
- Members suggested a pricing structure for the Coal Orchard car park that might help free up spaces for the users of the Brewhouse.
- Members queried what was happening with the Taunton Stadium Project.
The Chief Executive hoped that Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC) would focus the completion of the Brewhouse development rather than try and take on too many projects which would deflect the focus away from the Brewhouse. Their aim was to have their project set up to a high standard to generate the desired income results.
- Members queried what would the development achieve.
It would achieve a much better equipped larger auditorium, which they would use to attract the touring shows to pull in the wider audiences and raise the income needed to help sustain the theatre. It would also mean better facilities across the whole building which included the retention of the cinema.
- Concern was raised on the finances and that their savings had gone down.
The Brewhouse did not have the same resources that other theatres had. Part of their strategy was to calculate the optimum seating capacity so they could increase the income generated. Further information on their finances and development options were given.
- Members queried what was included in the grants section of the finance report.
It included grants from TDBC, various grants from the Arts Council and grants from the National Lottery.
- Members highlighted that they received fliers through their door for a theatre in Yeovil but not from the Brewhouse.

The theatre in Yeovil was fully funded by South Somerset District Council, so had a higher budget for marketing.

- Members highlighted the success of the Polish film that had recently been screened at the cinema and queried whether films in other languages would be shown.

Yes to encourage other audiences to use the facilities.

- Members supported the development project at the Brewhouse and queried how they would manage the events scheduled for when the building could not be used due to the development works.

The Chief Executive and Chair of Trustees were trying to keep the period of time the building would be closed to a minimum and were looking into alternative venues to use during that time. They were carrying out a lot of work to ensure that participants were involved during the development and they would go out into the community and consult on the options available.

- Members praised the Chief Executive and Chair of Trustees on the positive position the Brewhouse was in and the participation events that were held at the theatre.
- Concern was raised on the development of the Coal Orchard.
Members were reminded of the role of the Scrutiny Committee and that certain topics could not be discussed, e.g. planning applications.
- Members queried how the Committee could take any actions discussed at the meeting forward through the democratic process.
The Chairman confirmed that they could make recommendations to Full Council and was happy to support the option for the development of an auditorium with an optimum seating capacity.
- Members suggested a Spotlight Task and Finish event could be set up to focus on the options for the Brewhouse Development.

Resolved that the Scrutiny Committee:-

- 1) Noted the update report.
- 2) Requested clarification from the Council over who was the Lead Officer on the Brewhouse Project and for them to bring a report back to the Committee as soon as practicable that took into account the latest research undertaken by MACE.
- 3) To run a Scrutiny Task and Finish 'Spotlight Review' as soon as capacity allowed to focus on the Brewhouse Project issues discussed at the meeting and to investigate how the Council could further facilitate and support their ambitions.
- 4) To recommend that the Council worked with partners including SCC to make improvements to the parking offer for the theatre which included the access from Canon Street car park.

39. **Quarter Two Performance Report**

Considered report previously circulated, which provided Members with key performance management data up to the end of Quarter Two 2018-19, to assist in monitoring the Council's performance.

There were three red measures reported in Quarter Two:-

- 6.2.5 – Freedom of Information requests responded to within 20 working days;
- 6.2.4 – Customer complaints responded to within 20 working days; and
- HC4.12 – Number of households that had made a homeless application and percent accepted where we had a duty.

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Members queried whether West Somerset Council had the same performance targets.
Yes they did.
- Members highlighted that there were many green indicators which was a testimony to the staff and their hard work during a time of uncertainty.
- Concern was raised on HC4.12 and the homeless figures reported and it was suggested that officers from those areas should have been present to answer any questions raised at the meeting.
The Chairman agreed and supported their concern. He also thought it that the Portfolio Holder for Housing should have been present.
- Members requested a briefing on Homelessness.
- Members queried how many Freedom of Information requests were not answered and whether there were any particular departments that caused delays in the response times.
The Corporate Strategy and Performance Officer confirmed that the Revenues and Benefits departments were very good at submitting their responses in the required time period, but there wasn't any particular team that was slow in submitting their responses. The Council did not receive many requests that involved too much work which meant that they would be refused. There was currently an Information Management Project being undertaken which involved the new General Data Protection Regulations and data retention schemes.
- Members had submitted some questions, which included concerns on the homeless figures, to Full Council on 11 December 2018 and had not received an answer due to the time constraint at the meeting.
The Governance and Democracy Specialist had received the answers and would distribute to all Councillors.
- Members queried how many customer complaints were outstanding.
The types of complaints that were received varied, during Quarter Two, 44 had been received and 29 of those had been answered.
- Members queried the figures on homeless applications and whether they were people from outside the area or were they local applicants.
The Corporate Strategy and Performance Officer was not able to give the details at the meeting.
- Members believed that the applicants were unintentionally homeless and there was an expectation that they had a connection to the TDBC area.
- Members congratulated the Licensing Department on their hard work which had improved their performance results.
- Members queried whether there were procedures in place to monitor staff sickness, especially for those that had been off for a certain period of time.
Yes there was a return to work procedure that managers followed and occupational health would also be involved with certain cases.

Resolved that the Scrutiny Committee reviewed the Council's performance and highlighted any areas of particular concern.

40. **Scrutiny Work Programme**

Members were reminded that if they had an item they wanted to add to the agenda, that they should send their requests to the Governance and Democracy Specialist.

Resolved that the content of the Work Plan be noted.

(The Meeting ended at 8.15 pm)