

Committee: SCRUTINY 1 – COMMUNITY & HOUSING

Date: 12 JUNE 2002

Agenda Item No: 9

Title: BEST VALUE REVIEW OF LEISURE & CULTURAL SERVICES – PROGRESS REPORT

Author: Councillor R J O’Neill

MEMBER REFERENCE GROUP: Councillor R J O’Neill (Chairman), Councillor D Morson, Councillor Mrs S Schneider

Summary

- 1 This report details the progress made to date with the Best Value Review of Leisure & Cultural Services. It seeks comments from the Committee on whether the Review is progressing satisfactorily and recommends that the Scrutiny Committee notes progress and advises on what else needs to be considered.

The Services and their Costs

- 2 At the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee the Terms of Reference for the Best Value Review of Leisure & Cultural Services were confirmed.
- 3 The Member Reference Group has confirmed that the scope of services to be included in the Review should be those provided under the Leisure & Cultural banner, and Bridge End Gardens, if it is not to be reviewed this year within the Planning Best Value Review, as follows –

SERVICE	Budget 2002/03
<p><u>Sports Development</u> – The Sports Development Officer enables people to learn basic skills, participate in sports of their choice, develop their competence and performance and reach levels of excellence. This is achieved through promoting National initiatives such as Active Sports, Running Sport, and local programmes including the Sports Outreach programme and the holiday activity programmes. Specific projects are undertaken to provide opportunities for identified target groups where take-up or access to physical exercise is limited. He works closely with clubs/voluntary sector, ECC youth services, Schools, Essex Association of Boys Clubs, Social Services, Parish Councils etc.</p>	<p>Expenditure £ 91,620 Income (£ 17,000)</p>

<p><u>Tourism and Tourist Information Services</u> – The Tourism service provides advice to tourism businesses, promotes the area at home and abroad, monitors tourism developments to ensure preservation of the area, whilst maximising the economic benefits that tourism can bring. The Saffron Walden Tourist Information Centre and the Great Dunmow and Thaxted Community Information Centres provide a wide range of information about the district, the East of England region and the UK. A range of publicity material is produced including the Mini-Guide, an accommodation Guide, Town Trails and local history leaflets. The Tourism Service is the first point of contact for programme/film makers, writers & national journalists.</p>	<p>Expenditure £ 154,830 Income £ (22,210)</p>
<p><u>Museum Services</u> – The Saffron Walden Museum offers a wealth of subjects due to 167 years of collecting. The Museum enables people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. It safeguards collections in trust for society, both local and the worldwide community. It is fully registered under the government's Registration Scheme for Museums. The Museum provides long-term displays and temporary exhibitions, a programme of events and family activities throughout the year, formal and informal education and learning for all ages, research facilities and access to a wide range of collections. Staff at the Museum provide professional advice and support to the local community, including museum, heritage and environmental groups.</p>	<p>Expenditure £ 280,460 Income £ (32,490)</p>
<p><u>Leisure Services</u> – Primarily the Leisure Service carries out a Client role with regards the Leisure management Contract for the provision of the Council's two Leisure Centres (Saffron Walden & Great Dunmow) operated by an external leisure management contractor. This includes working with the Contract to enable disadvantaged groups to access the facilities. (The Service will be responsible for monitoring the performance of the leisure contractor under the new PFI arrangements.) The Service also coordinates health related programmes such as the GP and Physiotherapy Referral Schemes and works with the PCT towards targeted projects in line with the objectives of the HIMP. It plays a major and coordinating role in the functioning of the Youth Initiatives Working Group and provides external funding/grant seek advice for example for National Lottery applications, to community groups and in-house projects. It is often necessary for the Service to react to national, regional and county strategies and community demands and needs.</p>	<p>Expenditure £ 736,790* Income £ (30,710)</p> <p>* Of this figure, £250,000 is allocated to the PFI project and £240,000 is allocated to Capital Charges for the Leisure Centres.</p>

<p><u>Grants given to sports and arts organisations</u> - from the Ad Hoc, Voluntary Organisation and Community Project Grant Schemes, a proportion of the budget has, in the past, been awarded towards sports and arts organisations/projects, including the Community Sports Forum which distributes minor grants to Sports Clubs/individuals. The policy of giving grants to local organisations was confirmed last year following a best value review.</p>	<p>Ad Hoc (£5,000), Voluntary Organisation (£10,000) Community Project (£40,000 Capital Programme)</p>
<p><u>Arts Development</u> – The Arts Development Officer identifies opportunities for people to learn about and participate in the arts (broadly defined as performance arts, visual arts and literature) with the aim of developing individual/group competence, encouraging excellence and contributing to the overall quality of life in the district. The focus is mainly on the voluntary sector using professional artists/support where needed. The service runs holiday arts courses, assists groups with advice, training, promotion of special events and grant applications. The service develops and implements appropriate ECC initiatives in the district. The ADO works closely with local schools, clubs and voluntary organisations, professional artists, ECC, Thaxted Festival etc.</p>	<p>Expenditure £ 47,580 Income (£ 11,410)</p>

Progress to Date

- 4 The Member Reference Group has met with officers on three occasions. The “Critical Friends” for the review are David Williams, Head Teacher of Mountfitchet High School, Stansted Mountfitchet and Linda Scrutton, a Work Force Development advisor for Business Link for Essex. The first meeting gave the opportunity to confirm details of the Review, including confirmation of a work programme and an initial discussion about a Challenge Event. In addition, Members discussed how to consider the issue of Charitable Status for the Museum. It was agreed that Councillor Copping would be approached for details of his experience of setting up a Trust with the Maltings, Great Dunmow and the Museum Curator would seek comparable examples from other museums before deciding whether to appoint an external advisor to provide a professional view about such an approach.

- 5 The second meeting concentrated on the detail of the Challenge Event, to which over 100 people were invited. The invitees included partners, service users, National Governing Body representatives, Members and staff. The Event was to address the fundamental and specific questions posed in the Terms of Reference. The Member Reference Group were to circulate amongst the discussion groups and gather feedback and impressions about the work being carried out by officers. Prior to a mid-Event break, the Member Reference Group and David Williams would form a Question Time panel and

pose questions to all of the attendees regarding service delivery, access to services and partnership working.

- 6 Members received detailed financial information about the Leisure & Cultural Services in response to a request from Councillor O'Neill. Information was provided about preliminary work that had been undertaken to Compare the Council's Leisure & Cultural Services with those provided by other Councils.
- 7 At the third meeting Members considered the details that had emerged from the Challenge Event and considered information with regard Charitable Trust Status acquired from other museums.

(a) "Challenge"

- 8 53 people attended a "Challenge Event" held on 15 May 2002. They were asked to address the fundamental and specific questions posed in the Review's Terms of Reference. This was achieved by dividing the attendees into service specific groups to consider questions in terms of the service for which they had an interest – Tourism, Sports Development, Leisure Services, Museum and Arts Development – and asking them to consider more generic questions about all Leisure & Cultural Services.
- 9 The general view was that all of the services are highly regarded, delivered professionally and effectively and, in particular, provide the Council with direct and effective links with partners and the community. The key issues that emerged from the sessions, and in response to Members Questions, were
 - PR – Can the publicity and promotion of the services be more effective?
 - Priorities/Target resources –Can the Council prioritise what needs to be done and be more effective by targeting services/resources?
 - Partnerships – Relations with partners are excellent and work carried out is effective – can more be done together?
 - Access – How can the Council minimise the impact that the rural nature of the district has on service delivery?
 - Facilities – Can the Council offer more strategic advice and guidance in the provision of play and recreation facilities across the district? Can/should the Council be more proactive in the development of an Arts Centre facility? How can the Council address the need for more storage for the Museum?
 - Youth – What more can the Council do to target services towards the youth? How can the Council get young people positively and practically involved in youth focused services?
- 10 An analysis/synopsis of the responses to the questions is given at Appendix 1.

(b) "Compare"

- 11 Officers have written to 11 local authorities seeking information about their leisure and cultural services to enable comparative work to be undertaken. Eight of the authorities have undergone a Best Value Inspection of their

Leisure and Cultural reviews and three have achieved excellent Performance Indicator standards.

- 12 Initial evaluation of the information received from three of the 11 authorities endorses the value of the contribution made by leisure and cultural services to the social, economic and environmental well-being of the community. It is intended that further contact will be made with two or three of the 11 authorities that have achieved excellent reviews to obtain specific advice and suggestions about improvements and alternative means of service delivery.
- 13 In addition, service specific comparative work is being undertaken by Officers who are contacting colleagues in other districts to obtain information about the services they provide and compare them with the Council's own service. This work includes further contact with Museums run as Charitable Trusts.
- 14 Clearly, local demand and need has a bearing upon the extent that a local authority goes in the provision of leisure and cultural services. Therefore, effectiveness of the comparative exercise is minimal. The comparative process has, however, endorsed the view of those attending the Challenge Event that locally delivered leisure and cultural services are supported and important to enhance the quality of life, improve health and facilitate social interaction and community identity.

(c) Fundamental/Specific Questions – Terms of Reference

- 15 The Scrutiny Committee expressed a wish at its last meeting to refer back to the fundamental and specific questions posed in the original Terms of Reference during the course of the Review.

Some fundamental general questions

- What is the Council wanting to achieve in future in relation to leisure and cultural services?
- Does the Council have a statutory obligation to provide the services? Are there any other specific obligations, e.g. contracts?
- If not should the Council cease to provide the services and, if so, what is its impact?
- If the services are to be continued are there better alternative ways to deliver the services – in-house, outsourcing, partnership, sponsorship?

Some specific questions

- Are we working to the greatest effect, with others, to bring real benefits to the Uttlesford community in terms of its access to leisure facilities?
- Are we providing an important complementary role to other service providers, e.g. the voluntary sector, ECC (youth/arts/cultural services), leisure centres and the tourism sector?
- Should we increase our focus on those requiring greatest support, e.g. disadvantaged young persons, those 'isolated' within the villages?
- How can the arts be developed with limited resources?
- Is there a better, more effective, way to run the Museum service, e.g. external support - charitable trust, Museum Society, grants, volunteers?

- Can the Museum service meets the requirements and demands on it with expected levels of resource availability?
- Are the Council's charging policies appropriate?

Further Work to be Done

- 16 The Member Reference Group are concerned, that although it has received some very positive feedback and information about why people like what the Council does and how appreciative they are of the work that is done, there were few original suggestions for improvements. To this end, the Member Reference Group has decided that it should meet with leading representatives of some of the groups that are worked with to discuss in more detail the current working arrangements and whether there are opportunities for improvement. Groups are to include the Museum Society and Essex County Council's Sports Development, Arts Development, Tourism and Youth Services.
- 17 With regard to consideration of Charitable Trust Status for the Museum, the Member Reference Group will be discussing with representatives of the Museum Society the suggestions that have been made for Charitable Trust Status and/or greater involvement of the Museum Society in fundraising and income generating activities.
- 18 Meetings with representatives of leading groups will take place during the next month or so. The comparative work, described above will be carried out over the next couple of months. As a result of the "Compare" work, together with the outcome of the "Challenge" work, a number of options for improvement will emerge. The Member Reference Group will be researching and assessing these options to consider whether they will lead to significant improvement contribute to the Corporate Objectives and Community Priorities, are financially viable and that improvements are achievable. This work will be achieved through consultation, comparison with current performance, an assessment of external funding routes and market and competition research.

Recommended that the Committee note progress made and advise on what else needs to be considered.

Background Papers: Best Value Review of Leisure & Cultural Services File
(held by Sarah McLagan)