

FINANCE AND SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 OCTOBER 2015

PRESENT: Councillor M Rand (Chairman); Councillors B Chapple OBE (Vice-Chairman), J Chilver, B Everitt, A Huxley, S Lambert, E Sims, M Smith and M Winn. Councillors Mordue and Sir Beville Stanier attended also.

APOLOGIES: Councillors J Bloom and M Stamp

1. COUNCILLOR JOHN CARTWRIGHT

Prior to the commencement of the formal business of the meeting all those present stood in silent tribute to the memory of Councillor John Cartwright, Leader of the Council from 2001-2013 and a Member of this Scrutiny Committee up until the May 2015 elections, who had passed away recently.

2. MINUTES

Members requested that they be provided with copies of the minutes of the contract performance meetings held between Everyone Active and AVDC (Minute 2 (xii)), and it was –

RESOLVED –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 June, 2015, be approved as a correct record.

3. AYLESBURY WATERSIDE THEATRE CONTRACT REVIEW

The Committee received a report that had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 1 September, 2015, (and was summarised in the minutes of the meeting) on the outcome of the 5 year review of the Aylesbury Waterside Theatre contract.

The five year review of the Aylesbury Waterside Theatre (AWT) contract with the Ambassador Theatre Group (ATG) had been conducted in accordance with the provisions of the current 15 year contract. The contract had commenced in October 2010 and included a six year funding agreement which was due to terminate on 9 October 2016, with a formal contract review in year 5. The existing contract remained in force until October 2025.

The Council had engaged the services of a theatre consultant to help with the review and to provide independent expert advice regarding the options and opportunities. Artservice Ltd were commissioned to review the original submission, evaluate what had been delivered and comment on the options and a suggested course of action. The detailed confidential report from Artservice was considered by the Scrutiny Committee as part of their deliberations.

The principal reason for bringing the report to the Scrutiny Committee was to inform Members on the future direction for the management and operation of the theatre, prior to the required contract documentation being updated with ATG. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Compliance had also agreed not to implement the decision prior to the Committee meeting.

Members requested further information and were informed:-

- (i) that the second space at the theatre was fulfilling the role it had been designed for, although it was accepted that more could be done to encourage community use and smaller scale activities by local groups. As such, ATG had recently taken on a member of staff whose job it would be to help promote the second space.
- (ii) that if ATG thought that the space was not suitable then the Council would expect the operator to make some changes to improve its functionality and marketability.
- (iii) that the Council believed that ATG had delivered on its commitment to providing a balanced programme of events at the theatre that catered to different audience tastes. While there were not as many live rock and pop evenings as some Members might wish for, there were a number of issues that impacted on this including market forces, profitability and having to compete with nearby theatres. It was acknowledged that there were a number of tribute acts scheduled, which was largely in response to local demand and the fact that they were more profitable to put on.
- (iv) that the nearby Travelodge had high occupancy rates although it was unfortunate it had not opened at the same time as the theatre. Despite this, there was still an overall lack of hotel accommodation in the centre of Aylesbury, which it was hoped would improve in the longer term.
- (v) that AVDC would continue to use its best endeavours to ensure that coach drop off and pick up arrangements remained a high priority and that signage, way-marking and the public realm continued to be improved wherever practicable, for visitors, both pedestrians and by vehicles to the theatre. There were a number of factors that made it very difficult for additional coach drop off to be provided in Exchange Street at the front of the theatre and this was explained to Members.
- (vi) an explanation was provided of the Building Levy and the "Special Maintenance" sinking fund, their purpose, and how they operated. Members were informed that use of the Building Levy was not ring-fenced.
- (vii) that the Council had an agreement with the Odeon cinema regarding the reimbursement of car parking charges for cinema patrons. However, no such agreement had been made for the theatre so if ATG decided to reimburse car parking charges for theatre patrons then it would be at their own expense.
- (viii) information was provided on the appraisal of the Programme Balance and on the number of "dark nights".
- (ix) that it was hoped that annual attendances and ticket sales at the theatre would continue to increase as the local economy improved and the town centre was further regenerated.

Members commented that they would like to see more rock and pop live events put on, particularly given Aylesbury rich heritage as a live music venue, and that more should be done to make the theatre available to community groups on "dark nights".

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the new financial terms and other proposals that had been agreed for the management and operation of the Aylesbury Waterside Theatre by the Ambassador Theatre Group, as set out in the Cabinet report, be noted.

- (2) That the Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Compliance be asked to take into consideration the comments made at this meeting in finalising the new terms / contract condition with the Ambassador Theatre Group.

4. HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELL-BEING PERFORMANCE 2014-15 AND STRATEGY 2015-18

The Council had been producing an annual health and safety performance report since 2004. However, this was the first time that a Health, Safety and Well-Being Strategy had been produced. With Health and Safety one of the top 15 Council risks as identified by Cabinet in October 2015 it was considered appropriate to develop a structured approach to increase the profile of health, safety and well-being across the Council. A strategy had been put together that identified the strategic topics and work streams for the next 3 years and which also allowed for work plans to be developed annually.

The Strategy would also ensure that a consistent approach was taken to addressing health, safety and well-being risks across the Council. AVDC had taken the opportunity to fully embrace 'well-being' as defined by the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) and recognised the importance of having a sustainable workforce.

The Health, Safety, and Well-Being Committee had been consulted and provided feedback on the content of the Action Plan. The Strategy and Action Plan had also been reported to the Strategic Occupational Safety, Health and Well-Being Forum.

Members were asked to make any relevant comments or suggestions that they wished Cabinet to consider at their meeting on 10 November, 2015, in finalising and adopting the Strategy.

Members sought further information and were informed that absence due to industrial accident (days off) could be attributable to a small number of staff as an accident could lead to a long period before a person was able to return to their normal work duties. The majority of the 22 public liability claims from members of the public related to reports that their vehicle had been hit by an AVDC refuse vehicle. The reason that there were only 2 settled or ongoing claims was due to the remaining claims being successfully defended/rebutted by the Council. AVDC refuse vehicles were now fitted cameras giving 360 degrees coverage so the Council was able to compare film footage for any claims that were made.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the Annual Health and Safety Report 2014-2015, and the Health, Safety and Well-being Strategy 2015-18 be noted.
- (2) That Cabinet be recommended to adopt the Health, Safety and Well-Being Strategy 2015-18.

5. QUARTERLY FINANCE DIGEST

The Committee received the report on the Council's financial performance for the period 1 April 2015 to 30 June 2015. The current position after the first quarter point of the year was that there was no change predicted in the year-end position, which was for no contribution to or from balances. Copies of the latest Quarterly Finance Digest had been circulated separately and Members referred to this document whilst considering the report.

The Council had spent £331,857 less on the provision of services than allowed in the budget. The majority of the reduced spend related to salary savings, which will be reflected in the September Digest by way of new forecast figures.

There were a few areas that had spent more than budgeted, one was in Accountancy where additional staffing costs were incurred on the implementation of the new finance system, TechOne, which had gone live on the 1 June, 2015.

Other areas included Building Control where the cost of hosting the Idox system had increased and the Chief Executive's section where preparatory work on a unitary status business case and consultancy costs around the Assessment Centre had been incurred. The last area was the Play Services function which continued to be funded by AVDC as negotiations continue regarding its transfer to a third party provider.

As reported throughout last year, budget holders' are asked continually to review all of their areas and to reforecast their budgets both positively and negatively in order to have as accurate a year end position as possible for the September Digest.

As well as the revenue budget the digest, on page 13, reports on the level of reserves and provisions and any movements that have been made during the quarter. During this quarter there has been no movement in reserves and so the balance remained at £27.7m. As in most years, reserve movements tended to be in the last quarter so the position shown in this digest was not unexpected.

Page 15 contained information on the level of investments and borrowings during the first quarter. No new borrowing has been taken out during the quarter and so the current level remains at £28.5m. The council had £38.5m invested at the end of the quarter, in a combination of banks and building societies.

RESOLVED –

That the content of the Quarterly Finance Digest for the period April to June 2015, be noted.

6. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered their work programme for the period up until April 2016. It was agreed that agenda items for future meetings would be:-

- (i) 16 November 2015 meeting
 - Budget Setting 2016/17.
 - Business Rates.
 - Capital Programme.
 - Waterside North Phase 1.
 - Quarterly Finance Digest (April to September 2015).
- (ii) 14 December 2015 meeting
 - Budget Scrutiny – Cabinet's initial budget proposals for 2016/17.
 - Public Sector Equality Duty
- (iii) 8 February 2016 and 5 April 2016 meetings
 - No items as yet.

RESOLVED –

That the work programme be agreed, as discussed at the meeting.