

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

ARTS, LEISURE AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Arts, Leisure and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in **Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF** on **Wednesday 14 December 2016** at **2.00 p.m.**

PRESENT

Councillor T. Johnstone
(in the Chair)

MEMBERS

Dodd, R.
Gallacher B.
Homer, C.

Reid, A.W.
Richards, M.E.
Woodman, J.

OFFICERS

Allen, P.
Beattie, L.

Dewison, L.
Fell, J.

Little, L.
Walsh, N.

Scrutiny Officer
Leisure Strategy & Development
Manager, Active Northumberland (AN)
Chief Executive (AN)
Heritage and Events Development
Manager (AN)
Democratic Services Officer
Design and Cultural Services Manager
(AN)

ALSO PRESENT

Tyler, V.
Cairns. H (Part)

Cabinet Member

25. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Cairns, Pidcock and Rickerby.

26. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Arts, Leisure and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 28 September, 2016, as circulated, be agreed as a true record and be signed by the Chair with the following amendment noted:-

Apologies - Add Councillor C. Homer.

27. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The published Forward Plan (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix A**) was presented.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

REPORTS TO BE CONSIDERED BY SCRUTINY

28. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF ACTIVE NORTHUMBERLAND

(a) Tall Ships Debrief

N. Walsh, Design and Cultural Services Manager provided a presentation on the 2016 North Sea Tall Ships Regatta held in Blyth between 26 - 29 August 2016 (copy filed with the signed minutes). He advised that the mission had been to create the conditions for Northumberland's communities and economy to gain maximum benefit from the event.

Up to 450,000 visitors had attended across the four day event with a total estimated combined economic impact of £13.5 million for the County. 77 Sponsored trainees had taken part in the regatta itself and of the 140 volunteers assisting at the event, 100% had achieved a Level 2 qualification in customer service and visitor services.

Media coverage had included 370 articles of which 98.6% were positive. The event had been covered on BBC Breakfast and ITV had broadcast from the event across the weekend. The event generated a huge social media response with 6.7 million people seeing information on Facebook and 4.9 million people saw the #TallShipsBlyth on twitter. 278,000 People visited the Tall Ships Website with 13,500 people pre-booking their parking for the event.

The Committee was advised that 99% of all visitors agreed or strongly agreed that the Regatta 2016 was a good thing for Blyth with 80% of visitors from Northumberland being very likely to visit again; 80% of the rest of visitors from the North East and 63% of visitors from the rest of the UK likely to visit Blyth again. In respect of visiting Northumberland, 95% of visitors from the rest of the North East and 81% of visitors from the rest of the UK would visit again.

The challenges of hosting the four day event were outlined and information provided on how these had been accomplished was provided. A short video of the event was shown along with those from trainees talking about their experiences and a business owner talking of his experience.

In response to questions from Members the following information was noted:-

- £1.2 million had been invested in the event by Northumberland County Council with the income from the event maximised. A detailed budget was still being finalised due to discussions with suppliers and would be presented to the next meeting. A full report would also be provided to Council considering the return on the investment.
- The CCTV for the event had worked well using WIFI CCTV cameras and the highways network.
- Over 300 applicants initially applied to become trainees for the event with 77 actually sailing. A cut off point for replacing trainees who couldn't sail had been necessary due to travel arrangements.
- There had been very little anti social behaviour across the weekend with the Police indicating that it had been quieter than normal weekends in the town.
- The emergency services had coped well with the large influx of people into the town with an emergency treatment centre set up and the presence of armed police at the event had been well received.

Councillor V. Tyler, Cabinet Portfolio Holder advised that all beds within Northumberland had been fully booked for the Friday and Saturday nights of the event. During a presentation event she had attended Trainees had spoken of their experiences, the new skills learned and the fears they overcome to join the regatta. All the trainees had said it had been very worthwhile and they would all do it again.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

(b) Leisure Centres Pricing Policy

L. Dewison, Chief Executive of Active Northumberland advised that it had been necessary to introduce a fair pricing policy across all the AN sites. Due to prices at some centres not being updated there had been variations from customers paying £11 to £40 to access the same facilities with abuse of the Active Northumberland Card also reported.

Previously Northumberland County Council had subsidised the centres, however AN had been advised that the Council would no longer provide a subsidy and therefore it had been necessary to start to make AN a more commercial operation. Pricing comparisons had been undertaken with centres in North Tyneside, the Scottish Borders and Durham. The existing

concessions remained with a new concession of £26 per month for 14 to 21 year olds.

An announcement had been that a further two new leisure centres would be built in Blyth and Berwick along with those proposed at Ponteland and Morpeth. Members would be able to use any facility and have access to more classes than any other organisation in the region. The AN Board had made a difficult decision in agreeing to implement the revised pricing policy however this was considered necessary in the current economic climate. It had not been possible to send individual letters to every member due to the timescale involved in launching the new website with the revised pricing structure on 1 November 2016, however a blanket letter had been sent.

In response to questions from Members, the following information was noted:-

- It was difficult to do financial modelling due to the numbers of “sleeping members” who generally paid and did not use the facilities along with the drop in membership generally associated with holiday times and Christmas as previously there was no tie-in. There was a huge administrative cost associated with members cancelling and then rejoining which needed to be addressed and therefore the three options now available were, three month tie-in; twelve months; or pay as you go.
- Any problems associated with the abuse of membership previously experienced and the increased number of people accessing the centres generally to use the libraries would be countermanded by ensuring that all memberships were checked. Centres would get better technology to allow this to happen and staff would be ensuring customers had paid.
- It was acknowledged that the centres could not compete with all the private providers, however the centres were open from 7am until 10pm and the swimming pools were generally larger than those in private provider facilities.
- Membership figures could be provided but these changed on a daily basis.
- The GP referral scheme did not subsidise the cost of taking part in exercise for patients.
- No further changes to the pricing would be made before April 2018.

A Member reported that the amended pricing policy was still a huge issue with residents in Hexham and whilst she understood the reason for the change this could have been communicated in a better way as advertisements on the radio and prices on the website had been incorrect. Concern was also expressed regarding a reduction in membership and the impact this could have on the AN business plan and staff numbers.

It was recognised that if it had been the Council who were running the centres, then they would have had to make the same decision. Members requested

that a full report including levels of membership be received in the summer with an annual report thereafter.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The information be noted; and
2. A full report be provided in the summer with an annual update thereafter.

(c) Cycling in Northumberland

J. Fell, Heritage and Events Development Manager advised that the aim of hosting the Tour of Britain cycle ride in 2015 had been to raise the profile of Northumberland as a cycling destination and to promote the health benefits of cycling to residents of the County. The Council's Cycling and Walking Board together with the Northumberland Cycling Tourism Advisory Group were involved in bringing groups together and to increase the social and economic benefits of cycling.

The Committee was advised that the cycling route Sandstone Way which linked the very north of the County with Hexham had been launched. An initial run of 3,000 copies of printed cycle maps had sold out with good feedback received. The Cycle Northumberland brand had been developed and included the launch of a website and toolkit to be used by businesses wishing to provide facilities for cyclists. Numerous other improvements to the cycling network had been undertaken with future proposals including possible improvements to the A1 as part of the dualling process. Proposals for a European funding bid were being drafted with the aim of completing a missing section of cycle track through Wark Forest completing a cycling loop around Northumberland.

A survey had indicated that the average spend for a cyclist visiting the County was £478 and Members requested that information also be provided for those visiting to play golf or walk. It was confirmed that an approach would be made to Business Improvement in Hexham for funding of additional signage etc.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

(d) Leisure Strategy

L. Beattie, Leisure Strategy and Development Manager provided information on the progress of the Leisure Strategy. She advised that additional funding had been secured from Sport England and the Council's Planning Department as the provision of facilities was critical to the delivery of the Core Strategy. A company had been appointed to undertake the required surveys for both indoor and external facilities and an executive summary provided on the quality and quantity of facilities which in turn would help to access other funding for future development.

Northumberland had been selected as one of twelve pilot schemes to look at the impact/decline of swimming as part of the Swim Local Project and new ways of delivering swimming. Sport England paid for two pieces of research this included the use of focus groups of users and non users and an online survey. The need to improve facilities along with better customer service was highlighted as an important aspect of encouraging participation. Staff engagement and the requirement to tailor the offer for customers who required assistance were also noted.

It was recognised that sports development must also be focussed on the wider community as well as in leisure centres. There was good practice in some areas of the County however this had to be County wide. Sport England had changed their accountability and were now able to claw back funding if schemes were not successful.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER

29. Arts, Leisure and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

The Committee's work programme was attached as **Appendix B** to the signed minutes. An item on the Rural Tourism Academy was requested for February along with an item on the Hadrian's Wall Strategy. An update on the finance from the Tall Ships event would also be provided at the meeting in February.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

INFORMATION REPORT

30. *The following report was for information only and could be accessed through Northumberland County Council's Website. If a member of the Committee would like further explanation of the report, or had questions they wished to put to the relevant Cabinet Member, he/she should contact Democratic Services Section in order that appropriate arrangements could be made.*

The report gave details of the latest policy briefings, government announcements and ministerial speeches which may be of interest to Members.

31. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled to be held at 2.00 pm on Wednesday, 15 February 2017.

Chair _____

Date _____