

Lancashire County Council

Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 12th May, 2015 at 10.00 am in Cabinet Room 'C' - The Duke of Lancaster Room, County Hall, Preston

Agenda

Part I (Open to Press and Public)

No. Item

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

County Councillor Crompton declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 3 as a member of Preston City Council.

3. The Harris Museum and Art Gallery (The Harris) – Shared Services Initiative

The Committee considered the request made by five Members of the County Council that the decision made by the Cabinet Member for Environment, Planning and Cultural Services on 28 April 2015 on the Harris Museum & Art Gallery Shared Services Initiative, be "Called In".

The Committee welcomed County Councillor David Smith, County Councillor Albert Atkinson and County Councillor Anne Cheetham, presenting their reasons for the decision to be reconsidered.

The Committee also welcomed County Councillor Marcus Johnstone, Cabinet Member for Environment, Planning and Cultural Services; Louise Taylor, Corporate Director, Operations and Delivery; Phil Barrett, Director, Community Services and Julie Bell, Head of Service, Libraries, Museums, Culture and Registrars.

Councillors Smith, Atkinson and Cheetham outlined their reasons for supporting the request for the decision to be reconsidered. They queried whether there was a statutory requirement for LCC to have involvement with the project, and

expressed concerns that it appeared the proposal hadn't been detailed within the County Council's Budget, and therefore the method of funding.

It was voiced that the proposed £40,000 contribution to the managerial post per year, for three years, was excessive given that the Authority had been, and would continue to be, in a period of transformation which involved downsizing the organisation.

It was argued that the proposal was more advantageous for Preston City Council than for the County Council, and Members queried what the long term implications would be for the County Council with regard to staffing arrangements at the Harris Museum.

The Councillors presenting in support of the Call-In acknowledged the advantages of partnership working and the opportunities it could provide. However, concern was raised that the project appeared to be based upon aspiration without assurance that the cited figures from the Heritage Funding Agency could be attained, along with further cited sources of funding. It was also elucidated that the proposal could set a precedent resulting in District Council's requesting assistance with their own museums if the decision was not reconsidered.

The Committee then invited County Councillor Marcus Johnstone, Cabinet Member for Environment, Planning and Cultural Services, to speak. He referred to the three elements to the argument in favour of the "Call-In"; unbudgeted proposals, that the Harris Museum was the responsibility of Preston City Council, and a lack of detail around the staffing structure.

Regarding unbudgeted proposals, the Committee was informed that there was external funding available in the regenerate program for refurbishments, and in the Arts Council Resilience Fund. It was explained that these 'earmarked reserves' had been cited in the original report.

Concerning the perspective that the Harris Museum was Preston City Council's responsibility, it was emphasised that the Harris Museum was a very significant building in the North West of England, with 450,000 people visitors in 2014, and was considered to be a flagship landmark in the region, with comparisons made to St. George's Hall in Liverpool and Manchester Town Hall. The Committee was informed that the library service had been in situ at the Harris Museum since its inauguration, originally under the auspices of Preston Town Borough, and since 1974 under the auspices of the County Council in partnership with Preston City Council. Due to Preston City Council's budget constraints, it was expressed that assistance was necessary from the County Council.

The Heritage Lottery Fund, it was voiced, expected the demonstration of a robust partnership between the County Council and Preston City Council to receive funding and that the stance suggested by the opposition would be detrimental to any bid if moved.

Regarding the final element, a lack of detail around the managerial position and staffing, the Committee was informed that details had been outlined in the original report. The post holder, it was noted, would be responsible for drawing down additional funds, thus generating income for the Harris Museum, and increasing efficiency. The post holder would be responsible for developing and implementing a vision, and that this was the fundamental aspect towards securing funds from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Government to improve the Harris Museum. It was explained that the County Council, due to their own staffing levels, was unable to undertake this task, hence the necessity for a dedicated post.

The Committee highlighted a task group that had investigated issues around Arts funding in Lancashire, which had concluded that issues lay within the difficulty organisations had acquiring relatively small sums from the County Council. The Cabinet Member stated that it was imperative to ensure the correct groups received the funding, hence the stringency of the process. This was stressed to be increasingly important with consideration of funding reductions in recent years.

The Committee noted that the managerial post was overseen by PCC but paid, equally, by LCC, and therefore, queried whether paying for the managerial post would lead to input into the museum from LCC going forward. It was conveyed that LCC was working in partnership with PCC around the detail of the job description and would be working together through the shortlisting and appointment process. The manager would report to a joint officer board who would report to the Preston Collaboration Board, at which the Leaders and Deputy Leaders of both Councils attended.

Reference was made by the Committee to staff members of the Harris having received briefings on the proposed arrangement and queried what the collective feeling was from staff members. The Committee was informed that PCC and LCC staff had been briefed, and there had been no objections to the proposal. It was noted that the joint venture would provide an opportunity to analyse the staffing structure, including working hours and the use of space, which allowed for efficient and effective deployment of staff. It was expressed that this could lead to savings for both LCC and PCC, which would offset the cost of the contribution towards the managerial post.

It was asked if the project could be considered to be a pilot for other cultural facilities within Lancashire. It was conveyed to the Committee that the project was innovative and, if successful, could lead to the implementation of analogous arrangements at other cultural facilities. It was explained that, historically, LCC had worked creatively in partnership with Districts, such as in the joint arrangements with Lancaster City Council for the operation of Lancaster Maritime Museum. It was emphasised that new ways of working and the identification of efficiencies would become increasingly important in the coming years.

The Committee noted that encouragement was taken from the possibility that the project could be perceived to be a pilot. Reference was made to how the Fylde Parks Initiative, which had brought in significant funding for the area, had demonstrated how joint working could benefit the community. The Cabinet

Member agreed that this was a good example of how an authority was able to improve and enhance a facility by working outside of the normal channels.

Clarification was sought around the responsibilities of the managerial position by the Committee. It was explained that the manager would be responsible for; implementing a vision for obtaining the Heritage Lottery Fund capital investment, for operating the building efficiently, for the regeneration of the building, for managing the staff members of PCC and LCC employed at the Harris, and to maximise the use of the Harris, for example, reopening the café, which would generate income.

Following the debate, the Committee was invited to vote on whether the decision made by the Cabinet Member for Environment, Planning and Cultural Services on the Harris Museum & Art Gallery Shared Services Initiative, should be reconsidered.

Resolved: that the Cabinet Member should not be asked to reconsider his decision made on 28 April 2015 on the Harris Museum & Art Gallery Shared Services Initiative.

4. Urgent Business

No urgent business.

5. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be at 10.30 on Friday 19 June at County Hall, Preston.

I Young
Director of Governance,
Finance and Public Services

County Hall
Preston