

POLICY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8th January 2007

Present: Councillor Derbyshire (Chair)
Councillor P Mortimer (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Greenslade, Khan, Mahmood, McGovern and Mrs Punter

PDS37- APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP
06/07

There were no apologies or changes of membership.

PDS38- DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS
06/07

There were no disclosures of interest.

PDS39- MINUTES
06/07

The minutes of the meetings held on 20th November were submitted and signed.

PDS40- CABINET RESPONSE TO THE SOCIAL COHESION REPORT
06/07

The Chair outlined the Cabinet responses regarding the Social and Community Cohesion in Watford report from its meeting on 12th September 2006. He invited comments from Members.

One Member said that it was important to note that social cohesion was not only related to faith issues. The Chair agreed and said the report expressed that sentiment.

RESOLVED –

that the report be noted.

PDS41- REPORT OF THE BASINGSTOKE VISIT
06/07

The Committee considered this item together with the following item as it formed part of the draft Colosseum report.

PDS42- DRAFT COLOSSEUM REPORT
06/07

The Chair introduced the draft Colosseum report and invited Members to discuss it with a view to finalising it if possible and agreeing recommendations.

A Member pointed out that Councillor McQuire was not a member of the Committee as suggested in the report. The Chair said this would be amended.

A Member mentioned a few spelling and minor word changes in sections of the report as follows:

- 2.2.7, the word *passes* needed changing to *passed*
- 2.4.19, the following word needed changing to 'It was generally felt that a big weakness in the past had **been** the lack....'
- 2.5.2, a word needed removing as follows 'The report concluded that many town centres are currently dominated ~~by~~ after hours by....'
- 2.5.4, a word needed removing as follows '....would make a significant contribution to ~~the~~ attaining the Civic Trust....'
- 3.6.3, word to be changed as follows 'Both Southampton and Basingstoke Councils said **that** one of....'
- 3.7.1 and 3.7.2, both \$ signs needed to be changed to £ signs.
- Appendix 6, 4.13, word to be amended to read '...The Anvil is an exception because of the reputation **it** has developed.'
- Appendix 6, 4.21, a spelling correction needed as follows '....The Council **has** decided and the Arts Council....'

A Member expressed concern that in section 2.3.2 of the report, the figure £1.5m was mentioned. She said the figure had been taken from a Consultant's report that was now out of date and felt that the Committee had not sufficiently analysed the figure. Other Members agreed that the figure should not be mentioned. The Committee, however, generally agreed that the lower option for capital expenditure would be adequate. Members agreed that the paragraph would be changed to read:

*'Regarding capital spending options detailed in the Consultant's reports, the Committee feel that expenditure at the proposed **minimum level may** be adequate to restore the Colosseum as a fit for purpose fully functioning public performance venue.'*

This was also relevant to section 2.4.9 where the £1.5m figure was also mentioned. It was agreed that this paragraph would be amended to read:

*'It was felt that the hire demand for large events such as dinners and weddings would require renovation of the kitchen which was included in **option 1** of the capital programme recommended in the Consultant's report.'*

With regard to section 2.3.3 of the report, a Member suggested adding a sentence about the need for the effect on the acoustics of the retractable motorised seating to be considered. Members agreed with this addition.

The Chair said that in section 3.1, two of the four bullet points as cited from the Consultant's report had been missed out and would be added.

A Member suggested that in section 4.7 of appendix 6, a sentence be added explaining that not much extra funding had been gained by having a Trust status. The Chair and other Members agreed that this should be added.

Another Member mentioned the missing facts in the appendices about the cities visited. He suggested that a table could be included on the social infrastructure of the locations with relevant information. Another Member said that this had not been investigated on the visits and was concerned as to what information would be relevant. Other Members, however, felt that some factual information could be useful and it was suggested that some basic demographic information be tabled as Appendix 8 of the report.

The Chair then asked the Committee to consider if it wished to make any recommendations. He tabled four draft proposals as a basis for the discussion as follows:

1. that the restoration as soon as possible of the Colosseum venue as a fully-operational public performance venue with a regular programme of events ranging from popular music and light entertainment through to classical orchestral concerts be adopted as a core element of the Council's cultural policy;
2. that the Council should accept that a performance venue with the sort of programme proposed in above will require revenue funding support at least of the same order as that already provided to Watford Palace Theatre;
3. that the name Colosseum for the venue be dropped and that the venue should be re-launched as "Watford Town Hall";
4. that the model to be adopted for the future operational management of the venue when re-launched should be.....

Members discussed the first draft recommendation and felt that it would be better not to be too specific about what type of performance events could be held at the Colosseum as it may give the impression that other events such as non-performance events not mentioned would not be desirable. One Member mentioned the contract with the BBC and suggested that retaining the current contract with the BBC could be included in the recommendation. Other Members thought that it may be more appropriate to leave this open as in the future there may be other more appropriate opportunities. Another Member questioned whether the Colosseum would form a core element of the cultural policy and suggested that it was more a significant part than a core part. Other Members agreed with this and it was agreed that the first recommendation would be amended to read:

'That the restoration as soon as possible of the Colosseum venue as a fully operational public performance venue with a regular wide-ranging programme of events be adopted as a significant element of the Council's cultural policy.'

The Committee discussed the second draft recommendation and whilst Members agreed that the venue would require revenue funding support however it was run, they expressed concern at benchmarking the amount as it was impossible to say how much funding would be necessary at this stage.

Members agreed therefore that the second draft recommendation would be removed.

On discussing the third draft recommendation, the Committee agreed that the name should be changed from *The Colosseum*. This had been a strong feeling expressed at the public consultation meeting. The Chair said there had been a wide view expressed at that meeting to go back to the name "Watford Town Hall" with which some Members agreed. Other Members were concerned that this name was not modern and would be confused with the current Town Hall. The Chair asked for a show of hands which indicated that four Members thought the name should be changed to the "Watford Town Hall" and three Members felt that it should be changed but to something more modern, using public consultation to investigate. As the Committee did not fully agree, the Chair suggested and all Members agreed that the third draft recommendation be amended to:

'That a new name be adopted for the re-launch, with majority preference for Watford Town Hall and the minority preference for something with a more modern feel.'

The Chair explained that the last draft recommendation was intended to suggest the model that the Committee thought should be adopted if it was able to reach a decision. He said, having been on all the visits and after careful thought, he had concluded that the Southampton model (commercial operator) was his preferred option. He said it was the most efficient model, giving the best value for money and the lowest Council subsidy. The Chair said the success of any model depended on the expertise and strength of the management of the operation.

Another Member who had been on all the visits agreed with the Chair's conclusion. She said she was surprised having originally thought the Basingstoke model (Trust) would be the best. But, after the visits, she preferred the Southampton model. She said that Watford was too small a Council for any other model to be successful and that a commercial operator running the venue would not be affected by a change of political direction within the Council.

One Member said she preferred the Basingstoke model as Watford was a consumer nightmare and the Colosseum would lose its identity if run by a commercial operator. Another Member agreed and reminded the Committee that a commercial operator had failed at the Colosseum once before. He said that a Trust could be successful without the need for a large subsidy from the Council.

Another Member was concerned that the Committee had not done enough analysis to state which option would be preferred at this stage. He agreed that the benefits of the Southampton model were significant, especially given the size of Watford Council as it would cap the potential risk to the Council. He said, however, that a commercial operator had already failed once at the Colosseum and that a Trust would keep in touch with the local community. He suggested that the in-house option be rejected and that the Committee's recommendation could advise that one of two external options be chosen following further

detailed analysis. He also suggested that risk mitigation be added as a factor to be taken into account.

The Committee agreed that it was not in a position to make a recommendation promoting one of the external options, although it agreed that the Cambridge (in-house) model could be discounted. It was agreed that the fourth draft recommendation be amended to read:

'That the options to be considered for the management and operation of the venue when re-launched should be the Southampton and Basingstoke models and that value for money and mitigation of risk should be significant consideration.'

RESOLVED -

that the following amendments be made to the report:

1. Cllr McQuire not to be referred to as a member of the Committee
2. 2.2.7, spelling mistake to be corrected, *passes to passed*
3. 2.3.2, paragraph to be amended to read *'Regarding capital spending options detailed in the Consultant's reports, the Committee feel that expenditure at the proposed **minimum level may** be adequate to restore the Colosseum as a fit for purpose fully functioning public performance venue.'*
4. 2.3.3, sentence to be added explaining that the effect of the retractable seating on the acoustics will be investigated.
5. 2.49, paragraph to be changed to *'It was felt that the hire demand for large events such as dinners and weddings would require renovation of the kitchen which was included in **option 1** of the capital programme recommended in the Consultant's report.'*
6. 2.4.19, a word to be added as follows *'It was generally felt that a big weakness in the past had **been** the lack.....'*
7. 2.5.2, that the word be removed as follows *'The report concluded that many town centres are currently dominated ~~by~~ after hours by....'*
8. 2.5.4, that the word be removed as follows *'....would make a significant contribution to ~~the~~ attaining the Civic Trust....'*
9. 3.1, the missing two bullet points from the Consultant's report to be added
10. 3.6.3, word to be amended as follows *'Both Southampton and Basingstoke Councils said **that** one of.....'*

11. 3.7.1 and 3.7.2, the \$ signs to be changed to £ signs.
12. Appendix 4, 5 and 6, a table of facts about the city to be made and tabled at appendix 8.
13. Appendix 5, 4.10, sentence to be completed.
14. Appendix 6, 4.7, a sentence to be added explaining that not much extra funding had been gained by having a Trust status.
15. Appendix 6, 4.13, word to be amended '...The Anvil is an exception because of the reputation **it** has developed.'
16. Appendix 6, 4.21, spelling to be corrected to '....The Council **has** decided and the Arts Council.....'

Recommendations to be included as follows:

1. That the restoration as soon as possible of the Colosseum venue as a fully operational public performance venue with a regular wide-ranging programme of events be adopted as a significant element of the Council's cultural policy;
2. That a new name be adopted for the re-launch, with majority preference for **Watford Town Hall** and minority preference for something with a more modern feel;
3. That the options to be considered for the management and operation of the venue when re-launched should be the Southampton and Basingstoke models and that value for money and mitigation of risk should be significant considerations.

Chair
Policy Development Scrutiny Committee

The meeting began at 7.00 pm
and finished 8.50 pm.