

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 16 March 2023

Draft Minute 72 - Leisure and Culture Strategy

The Committee received a covering report and the Leisure and Culture Strategy.

Several advance questions on this item had been submitted prior to the meeting. The advance questions and their responses can be viewed here:

[Document Advance Questions and Answers OS 16 March 2023 | Reigate and Banstead Borough Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.moderngov.co.uk/2023/03/16/document-advance-questions-and-answers-os-16-march-2023-reigate-and-banstead-borough-council/)

The Committee thanked officers for their work on the Leisure & Culture Strategy and asked questions in the following areas:

Research

Members asked for information on the research carried out to inform the strategy. It was confirmed that SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analyses had been carried out, along with comparisons with leisure and culture services provided by other neighbouring local authorities, and ongoing market research.

The Executive Member for Leisure and Culture explained the scope of the strategy related not only to the Council's own provision through its leisure centres and the Harlequin Theatre, but also the wider leisure and cultural offer in the borough – for example parks and green spaces in the borough, the Archway theatre, and the Chipstead Playhouse.

Relationship with GLL

The contract with GLL would end in May 2024 and options were being considered. A contract term of 15 years was the standard practice. Currently, an annual income of £260k was received from GLL as a management fee. The assets are owned by the Council, and the Council has responsibility for maintenance, while GLL runs the operational contracts. It was confirmed that the Council works with GLL to resolve residents' complaints and regular performance reports are received from GLL.

Finances for Harlequin Theatre

Five years ago, the Council was subsidising the Harlequin with £700k. For this financial year, the target for subsidy had been set at £380k, but this was now forecast to be reduced to approximately £250k, through raising additional income. The intention was to reduce this further to a zero subsidy by 2025. It was reported that attendances had increased, and the variety of programmes offered had broadened.

A member expressed concern that on the basis of the strategy as presented for the Harlequin Theatre, there were current CIL capital bids totalling £1.75m.

Sustainability

It was commented that sustainability was mentioned throughout the document but that the context of the word was not clear i.e., did this refer to environmental sustainability or financial sustainability? It was agreed that the wording would be reviewed.

Conclusions

Members debated the contents of the strategy document as presented at some length, concluding that the strategy was a high-level document, encompassing an overall vision, the benefits, and four overriding objectives.

Officers confirmed that an implementation plan would follow with more operational detail.

The Committee agreed that the strategy as currently set out did not sufficiently and clearly identify how the stated objectives would be achieved, nor did it identify the weaknesses and challenges that would need to be overcome to do this. It also did not clearly identify the current offer to residents and what the Council aimed to provide in addition to the current offer.

The Committee in discussion with the Leader further considered it would be helpful for the Council to have a common agreement on what comprises a strategy - a strategy toolkit to identify how strategies are created and what they should include. (This was carried forward into the Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2023/24.)

RESOLVED – that the Committee

Noted the report and the Leisure & Culture Strategy and made the following recommendations to Executive:

- 1) The Leisure and Culture Strategy is reviewed and further developed to clearly identify the current leisure and culture offer to residents and what it aims to provide.
- 2) The Leisure & Culture Strategy is reviewed and further developed to identify how these objectives will be achieved.
- 3) The Leisure & Culture Strategy is reviewed and further developed to clearly identify the weaknesses and challenges in the current leisure and culture offer and how these will be overcome.