

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE: MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 14th April 2015

Time: 10.00a.m. – 11.15a.m.

Present: Councillors Bailey, Bates, Bullen, Cearns, Count (Chairman), Criswell, Henson (substituting for Reeve), Hickford, Hipkin, Leeke, McGuire, Orgee, Rylance, Sales, Schumann (substituting for D Brown), van de Ven (substituting for K Bourke) and Whitehead

Apologies: Councillors Bourke, D Brown and Reeve

103. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Cearns declared a non-statutory disclosable interest under the Code of Conduct in Minute No.105 as the Cambridge Central Library was located in his Division.

104. MINUTES – 12TH MARCH 2015

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th March 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. The Committee was reminded that the April meeting had originally been scheduled as a provisional meeting. It was therefore proposed that the Action Log for the March meeting would be included on the May agenda in order to provide officers with more time to progress the actions.

105. DECISION REVIEW – CAMBRIDGE CENTRAL LIBRARY ENTERPRISE CENTRE

a) Report from Monitoring Officer

The Committee received a report detailing the background to the review. Following the decision of the Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee (H&CIC) on 17th March 2015, fifteen members had requested a review regarding three elements of this decision. The report included a copy of the original report to the H&CIC and an extract of the minutes. Attention was drawn to the options available to the General Purposes Committee (GPC) under the decision review process. The Committee could either dismiss the decision or refer it back to the H&CIC for reconsideration, with a recommendation.

b) Response from Councillors who have requested the Review

The Council's Constitution provided for Councillors who had requested the review to have the right to address the Committee when it dealt with the issue subject to the usual limits on speeches. The Chairman therefore invited those members who had requested the review who were not on GPC to speak starting with Councillor Taylor who had initiated the decision review process.

Councillor Taylor expressed concern about the lack of engagement with the public. As a member of the H&CIC, she had only been aware of this proposal a week before the meeting. She understood that Council officers and Councillors from the then Cabinet had been talking to Kora for at least the last eighteen months. She was also aware that

the Chairman of GPC had known about this project, as part of his previous role as Cabinet Member for Resources. At the H&CI meeting, the Committee had been informed that it should agree the recommendation as the negotiations were so far along and the Council's reputation could suffer. She urged the Council to conduct meaningful consultation with Library members and the general public. She also requested a presentation from Kora so that the H&CIC could find out more about the ethos of this organisation and what was actually being proposed.

The Chairman invited the Committee to raise any questions of clarification. One member questioned the fact that Councillor Taylor had only been informed of the proposal a week before the H&CIC meeting. It was noted that the proposal had been included in the Business Plan for 2014/15 and 2015/16 approved by full Council. All Members had therefore been informed of the proposal. It was questioned whether Councillor Taylor's group had used the Spokes system as this proposal had been discussed by Spokes a month before the H&CIC meeting.

In response Councillor Taylor reported that she had not been aware of this proposal as a former Resources Spokes. The Library Plan did not include specific reference to an Enterprise Centre. She reiterated the fact that she had only been aware of the Kora proposal a month before the H&CIC meeting.

Councillor Ashwood informed the Committee that she was not averse totally to the proposals. She reported that she had worked at Cambridge Central Library for 29 years and was a strong supporter of public libraries. However, she acknowledged that the Council needed to generate income. She stressed the need for more information to be made available on the proposal and Kora in order to make a decision. She queried how it was proposed to manage the commercial and community concerns and whether the commercial would override community.

She highlighted the fact that the available floor plans were woefully small. She did not understand how the displacement of stock and the loss of study space, which was already under pressure, would be managed. The report to H&CIC had included two other options relating to an Adaptation of BFI Mediatheque, which had not yet had any formal planning, and an in-house Enterprise Centre, which had not been scoped. She stressed the need for these two options to be worked up. She was concerned about the pressure which would be put on Floors 1 and 2 and the impact on traditional library services if two thirds of the third floor was removed. She reiterated the need for meaningful consultation to be carried out particularly to identify whether the demand for an Enterprise Centre existed in the business community.

Councillor Scutt highlighted a number of issues relating to trust, business governance, access, localism and responsibility. She explained that it was vital for the Council to have the trust of the community. She reported that she had received the most communication she had ever received as a member on this issue. She felt that trust had broken down due to the lack of consultation. She stressed the need to review the business governance of Regus Kora. She highlighted the fact that the Council was putting more and more information on line and then proposing to reduce public access to computers. She raised the importance of localism for a Central Library, which acted as a community repository, serving the whole of Cambridgeshire. In conclusion, she raised the need for the Council to take responsibility for explaining the impact on services of the budget cuts it was suffering.

c) Public Speaking

The Chairman invited local resident, Mr John Rainbird, to address the Committee. Mr Rainbird had provided a copy of his speech in advance, which was circulated to the Committee. *(Note – Mr Rainbird has asked for his speech to be attached to the minutes. See Appendix 1)*

d) Petitions

The Chairman invited Ms Sara Payne to present a 2,741 signature petition requesting that Cambridgeshire County Council rethink its proposal to partner with a multinational group to privatise the third floor for Cambridge Central Library.

Ms Payne reported that 3,456 people had now signed the petition. In addressing the Committee, she deplored the lack of public consultation and the closure of a popular café. She highlighted the fact that income was not guaranteed and queried what would happen if the proposal was not profitable. She questioned why a decision had not been taken after the current consultation, which had started on 28 February and was due to finish on 30 April. She informed the Committee that the space was already well utilised particularly by young people studying where home was not an option. Cambridge Central Library was an important community resource with many students using the Cambridgeshire Collection. She therefore hoped that the third area would remain.

Members asked Ms Payne the following questions:

- to read out the exact wording of the petition. The Chairman read out the wording as follows: “We request that Cambridgeshire County Council rethink its proposal to partner with a multinational group with a history of unethical business practices to privatise the third floor of Cambridge Central Library, robbing the community of valued public space which is accessible to all”. The Chairman reported that this wording was not exactly the same as the wording included in his briefing note. He stressed the importance of the wording being the same in both documents in future.
- why the petitioners believed the Regus Group to be “unethical”. Ms Payne explained that the library was a public service and whilst the petitioners understood the impact of cuts to services, they were not happy about embarking on a deal. Whilst the Committee acknowledged the petitioners concerns, one Member expressed concern as to the use of the word “unethical” for a possible future partner of the Council. Ms Payne suggested that the Committee should talk to the people who had organised the petition.
- whether she was aware that the proposal did not include the whole of the third floor. Ms Payne explained that the impact of bringing in an Enterprise Zone would have a significant impact on the whole library. One Member queried that it was unclear as to what was meant by significant and asked whether moving stock around was significant. In response, Ms Payne asked where all the people would go.

The Committee queried whether it should accept the petition with the word “unethical” in it. The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that there was no legal basis to

refuse it. Other Members commented that the Committee was just receiving the petition; it was not saying the wording was correct. The Chairman confirmed that whilst the Committee could receive the petition, he stressed that the wording of the petition did not reflect the Council's view of Regus Kora's approach to business.

e) Response to the three elements of the Decision Review

The Chairman reminded the Committee that it had received a confidential appendix attached to the original H&CIC report. He explained that it would be necessary to exclude the press and public if any member wished to discuss this report. He also informed the Committee that the Democratic Services Manager had circulated letters or e-mails from the following:-

- John Bridge, Chief Executive, Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce
- Cambridge City Council – Notice of Motion to be proposed at its meeting on 16 April 2015
- Dr Alison Powell
- Mr Alasdair Austin and Year 11 Students from Chesterton Community College
- Michael Wiseman, Cambridge BID Board Chair
- Mrs Ann Fiddes
- Ms Sue Woodsford
- Ms Sarah Ingram Chair, Museum of Cambridge

The Chairman then invited those members who had requested the review who were GPC members to speak first.

Councillor Cearns highlighted the need for officers and councillors to do things in a new and innovative way but not to the detriment of the people they served. He was concerned about the lack of public consultation over the last 18 months. He raised the need for the Council to learn from this approach and put the needs of the community first.

Councillor Leeke explained that the main reason for requesting the decision review was the lack of consultation. The proposal had come as a complete surprise. He questioned whether the changes proposed were appropriate for a prime piece of real estate. He also queried the Council's relationship with Regus Kora and the need to reconsider the reasons for the proposal.

Councillor Sales acknowledged that most of his comments had been made. The lack of consultation was the principle reason for needing to refer the decision back to the H&CIC.

Councillor van de Ven reported that Councillor Taylor had proposed an amendment at the H&CIC in March to defer the decision to allow for the receipt of further detail particularly in relation to Kora and the results of the current consultation. She reported that she was not objecting to the proposal in principle. She drew attention to paragraph 1.2 of the report, she explained that Kora was the name missing from the previous reports. She reported that there had been a lack of information particularly in relation to the following: profit could not be guaranteed; lack of clarity regarding the timing of the 8 week closure; and the use of the library space for study during exam time. Officers had circulated a briefing note containing a lot of information. She was concerned that the

Committee should not make a decision based on this information as there were other reasons to refer it back to H&CIC.

Councillor Whitehead reported that she did not object in principle, as the Council was faced with making significant spending cuts it needed to think innovatively. However, she had been concerned about the amount of misinformation. She was also concerned about the wording of the petition in relation to “privatisation” and “unethical”. It was important that the public was aware why the Council had to generate income as it was faced with cuts and a reduction in public spending. It was therefore necessary to put this decision in the context of other decisions being made in relation to Adults Services and Children and Young People. The scale of cuts was significant with the Council having to make staff redundant and reduce some services. It was important that this proposal was not considered in isolation. She therefore urged the Council to think carefully how it consulted.

The Committee received a report addressing the three elements of the decision review. Attention was drawn to consultation with library members and the wider public, which had been restricted by a confidentiality agreement with Regus Kora. Members were also provided with information about Kora and the café to address the comment that inadequate information had been provided particularly on these two issues with which to make a decision. The report also set out the logistics of establishing the Enterprise Centre. During discussion, members made the following comments:

- queried why consultation with stakeholders could not have taken place without revealing the figures in the confidentiality agreement. The Head of Community and Cultural Services reported that the confidentiality agreement had been signed very early on before the Council could proceed to work with Regus Kora. It was noted that this was not unusual.
- queried the breakdown in voting on this item at H&CIC. It was noted that Councillor Taylor had voted against, three other members had abstained and a majority of 13 had voted in favour.

The Chairman of H&CIC acknowledged the concerns about consultation and lack of information. He proposed a motion, seconded by Councillor Hipkin, to refer the decision back to the meeting of H&CIC on 2nd June 2015 for re-consideration, this would allow for the consultation currently taking place and enable officers to obtain more information. If agreed, he reported that he would welcome a frank and open discussion at Committee.

One Member raised the need for GPC to review the decision in more detail. Following further discussion, it was proposed by Councillor Bullen and seconded by Councillor Henson that the question be put. On being put to the vote, this proposal that the question be put was carried by a majority.

It was then resolved unanimously to:

- consider the decision and to refer it back to the meeting of Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee on 2nd June 2015 for re-consideration, this would allow for the consultation currently taking place and enable officers to obtain more information.

106. GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE AGENDA PLAN AND APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES, PARTNERSHIP LIAISON AND ADVISORY GROUPS, AND INTERNAL ADVISORY GROUPS AND PANELS

The Committee was asked to review its agenda plan and to consider an extension of the remit of the Treasury Strategy Review working Group.

It was resolved:

- to note the agenda plan and agree the extension of the role of the Treasury Strategy Review Working Group to consider some of the issues raised at the presentation by consultants GVA to Members on the 23rd March entitled “Delivery of mixed tenure residential development”, and for the Group to report back to General Purposes Committee.

Chairman