

**Extract of Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee: Minutes**

Date: Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2015

Present: Councillors Ashwood, Bates (substituting for Cllr Butcher), Bullen (substituting for Cllr Reeve) Connor, Criswell, Gillick, Hickford (Chairman), Hipkin (substituting for Cllr Mason), Hunt, Kavanagh, Palmer, Rouse, Taylor, Tew and van de Ven

In attendance: Councillor Harty

Apologies: Councillors Butcher (Cllr Bates substituting), Frost, Mason (Cllr Hipkin substituting), Reeve (Cllr Bullen substituting) and Walsh;

**95. CAMBRIDGE LIBRARY ENTERPRISE CENTRE**

The Committee considered a report on a proposal to create an enterprise and innovation centre in Cambridge Central Library. Officers explained that this was in line with the draft Strategy for the Future of Library Services, and it would bring a substantial new income to the library service, as well as bringing opportunities for jobseekers, learners and entrepreneurs, including meeting rooms. The report also set out the cost of in-house options for similar services.

The Chairman drew Members' attention to comments in relation to the proposals that had been emailed by Councillor Scutt, and circulated to the Committee, for noting.

A number of Members commented that there was a lack of information on the organisation that would be running the Enterprise Centre, Kora, and requested more detail. It was further suggested that it would have been helpful for a representative from Kora to attend the meeting to respond to Member questions. They also queried why there had been no public consultation. Officers gave more information on Kora, explaining that it was part of the well-established Regus Group, and outlined the benefits the arrangement could bring. It was confirmed that a short period of public consultation was planned.

Debating the report, individual Members:

- welcomed the proposal, pointing out that there were valuable opportunities for synergies with the City Deal with no sacrifice for existing library services;
- expressed surprise that the Community Café was losing money and that the Committee was being asked to close it without alternatives being explored e.g. re-examining the Café's business plan. Officers explained that they had always been constrained by what they could offer, as it was in the terms of the agreement that the café provision had to be on the third floor. The current facility was well used and well loved, but not sustainable financially;

- supported the proposals on the basis of the benefits for skills, employment and supporting individuals and businesses in the county, especially the opportunities for young people, and the importance of competing not just nationally but internationally;
- suggested that there were a number of facilities in Cambridge city centre offering very similar facilities e.g. the Graduate Centre and the Pitt Building, plus a whole range of start-up/entrepreneur units. This point was acknowledged, but officers explained that the difference would be the context in which the Enterprise Centre operated, with a wide range of users, not just focused on traditional academic or business sectors;
- asked what would happen to the existing BFI (British Film Institute) facility. Officers explained that the contract with BFI had expired, and that the dedicated facility had been under utilised but they were working with BFI on a new model for the service which would see it more integrated into the general library offer;
- noted that the authority's lawyers had scrutinised the agreement and Regus was a well know company with a good track record, and that there were more detailed figures available on projected occupancy rates, etc. It was further noted that there would be a profit share arrangement with Kora, so it would be in the interests of all parties for the venture to turn a good profit.

In response to a number of points raised, specifically that the information on this proposal was only available when the Committee agenda was published, the Chairman reminded Members that in common with most reports coming to Committee, this report had been discussed at an early stage at a Spokes' meeting. He stressed the responsibility of Spokes to share items with their respective groups and also highlighted that it was Members' responsibility to research issues, and if necessary, follow up queries with officers prior to Committee meetings.

The following amendment was proposed by Councillor van de Ven and seconded by Councillor Taylor:

*to defer the decision to develop and Enterprise Centre in Cambridge Central Library, pending receipt of further detailed information on the proposals, including the opportunity to question Kora, and the opportunity for a robust consultation exercise.*

On being put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

Officers explained that they had been working with Kora for 18 months, but had been unable to share that work widely due to the commercial sensitivity. Whilst they felt that Kora would welcome the opportunity to present to Members, they suggested that the delay in timescales could be detrimental, especially as the savings and income for the proposal had already been included in the Council's business plan for 2015/16.

A Member commented that the risk of delaying this proposal could involve financial and reputational risk to the authority, and there was also an opportunity cost of not using that third floor of the central library productively. Another Member pointed out that there was a five year break clause, which should give comfort to those Members concerned about possible risks. Officers commented that whilst there would always be an element of risk and uncertainty in proceeding with any new scheme, they had worked very closely with Kora, and the Section 151 Officer and legal colleagues were satisfied with the proposed agreement.

It was resolved to:

- a) approve the development of an enterprise centre within Cambridge Central Library;
- b) enter into an agreement with Kora (part of the Regus Group) to create and run the Cambridge Library Enterprise Centre (CLEC); and
- c) delegate to the Executive - Director of Economy, Transport and Environment in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Highways & Community Infrastructure Committee authority to approve the final negotiations required to complete this project.