
Questions raised during the meeting

Questions 1. The Chairs agreed with P Spiro on investigating the possibility of a channel between the Community Council and Scrutiny Committees and obtaining clear information on the process.

Response: Claire Witney, Head of Community Engagement (consultation, involvement, participation).

There are currently no formal links between Overview and Scrutiny and Community Councils although a working relationship has developed to enable more public involvement in Scrutiny. The Council is currently responding to consultation on the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. This legislation is likely to influence the way in which the relationship between Overview and Scrutiny and Community Councils proceeds and more formal processes will be developed in due course.

Question 2. R Kane (Matcham Road):

“Is it true that the council has raised the rent of Priory Court Community Centre from a nominal price to £16,000 pa?”

It is well known that people’s mental (and physical) health is maintained and improved by social gatherings. Why then is the council killing off such gatherings in one of the most disadvantaged areas in the borough?”

Response: Sharon Baxter, Project Manager – Housing Services.

The original Community Centre at Priory Court was demolished and a new one was built to replace it in 2000. At this time the rental charge was increased to £16,800 pa. A lease was signed with a local community group in January 2001. Unfortunately, despite support from the Council, this group was not financially viable and the Council took action to negotiate new leasing arrangements with Circle Anglia, a registered social landlord in 2007-08.

Circle Anglia continue to support the range of community activities developed by the original community group including the luncheon club, bingo and over 50's projects, karate and chess club. Other programmes delivered through the centre include employment advice and support, healthy living projects, youth programmes, IT training, accredited courses, volunteering programme and community events. Projects are delivered in partnership with local residents, community and voluntary groups and statutory providers.

Question 3. P Spiro was concerned that most of the present catalogue at William Morris Gallery would not be entered into a database before the curator staff left. He believed this would lead to a possible loss of material from the collection. He asked how would the Service guarantee the security of the entirety of the WM collection?

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

There are many thousands of items in the gallery collections. These are recorded in the accession register (of which we have made a duplicate) and also categorised on index cards. The inputting of this data into specialist software will take a considerable time, but the new staff are starting to work on this. The current paper-based records provide a complete and secure inventory of the objects in the collection. On-site physical security measures are also in place. The electronic database would not necessarily be any more secure than the paper based records; the main function would be to enable better access to the collections information, which could be searched for under a number of pre determined key words.

Question 4. A resident asked what would be the plans for the Gallery building. He understood that it would incorporate a general idea for arts provision in the Borough. He asked if there was an intention to downgrade the collection.

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

There was a proposal made to the Trustees of the Gallery by the De Morgan Centre to transfer some of the collection material to a future new museum in Lambeth. These proposals were considered by Council Officers and the decision was taken to retain all of the collection material at the William Morris Gallery. There are no plans to downgrade the collection. However we will be looking at the role of contemporary art to enhance the interpretation of the collection. A good example of this is the current 'Handasah' exhibition at the gallery, of designs by a contemporary artist who draws inspiration from Islamic patterns, as did William Morris.

Question 5. A resident said that in September there was a strategy document relating to the future of the WM Gallery posted on the LBWF website, but it seemed to have been lost since then. He wanted to know what happened after September – is there another strategy in place? If so, what was the nature of it?

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

A Museum, Gallery and Archives Strategy was agreed by cabinet in 2006. This document is available on the Council's website <http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/index/leisure/cultural-strategies-for-waltham-forest.htm>

No additional strategy document has been posted on, or removed from, the website since the completion of the above document.

Question 6. D Allen (Lawrence Avenue) said the external community bins in McEntee Lodge run by Ascham Homes attracted fly tipping, and although Ascham Homes were responsible for the garages, they were left in a state of disrepair.

Response: Roger Ellul, Senior Estate Supervisor, Estate Services – Operational South, Ascham Homes.

Historically Ascham Homes has provided a bulk collection service to McEntee Avenue, the bulk is collected on a weekly basis. The residents place any unwanted items at the collection points, which are situated at the front of the blocks near the main entry doors to the blocks, my team remove the items for the residents free of charge.

I cannot recall the last time a resident reported fly tipping to me in this area. Having said that, there may well be fly tipping but as the bulk truck visits each week the bulk is removed very quickly and is not identified as fly tipping.

If any resident can identify the vehicle/s that are fly tipping to me or my team, I would inform the Enforcement Manager for Environmental Services Gareth Jones for investigation, any information will be dealt with in the strictest of confidence.

Question 7, David Allen (Lawrence Road) had concerns about the efficiency of mechanical street cleaners. He said that in Highams Hill, there the street cleaning was inadequate. He also said that in McEntee Avenue, there was a lot of fly tipping in the communal recycling area.

Response: Graeme Lawes, Interim Cleansing Manager-Street Services.

No Mechanical sweeping at present. Two mechanical sweepers will be employed for this area in the next 3-4 weeks. This will hopefully improve the cleansing. The Communal Bins are for the use of flats run by Ascham Homes.

Question 8: A resident (Blackhorse Road) reported that the road was not cleaned regularly and there were traces of rotten food, bones, etc

Response: Graeme Lawes, Interim Cleansing Manager-Street Services.

This is on the old mechanical sweeper scheduled, which has not been reliable over the past few months. Maintenance issue have been resolved.

Question 9. D Hallsworth (Douglas Avenue) asked the following questions:

1) "The are of Penrhyn Crescent is disgusting. Each week there are bags of rubbish dumped next to the green electric box outside OPW and other rubbish stuffed behind the unit".

2) "Douglas Avenue used to be swept regularly by the council until last year but now we rarely see a street cleaner. With the amount of leaves (which cannot really be helped) and the general street rubbish, residents cannot see the dog mess underneath. This has been a great problem in the last six months".

Response: Graeme Lawes, Interim Cleansing Manager-Street Services.

1) This is an Enforcement issue and has been passed over for action.

2) This is on the old mechanical sweeper scheduled, which has not been reliable over the past few months. Maintenance issue have been resolved.

Questions raised on Help Forms

Question 10. P Spiro (Somers Road): The response from Mimi Konisberg and Louise Frayne refers to the appointment of the new Head of Libraries, Museum and Gallery, in April 2007, when Mrs L Lee was appointed to this post, after a formal presentation and an interview on 30 April 2007 (see C Morton's minuted reply to query 8 – in minutes p7). – As an assimilation procedure appointment under the Council's personnel procedure called 'Managing Change' (a copy being made available at this evening's meeting).

Mrs Lee's previous post of Head of Museum Gallery and Archives graded PO 7/8 with a salary range of £40,782 - £45,048, having being deleted, she was, under the Management of Change Procedure appointed (see above) to the new post at PO 11 / 12 (with a salary range of £53,154 - £60,957 – see Mrs Lee's 'New staffing Structure' memorandum document 1.86 issued in June 2007.

However, the managing change policy statement clearly states (p11 – 9) Assimilating staff clause 5.2 that "Managers will not seek to assimilate staff if where the grade differential between the old and the new job is more than one grade up or down and where the essential requirements of the old and new jobs are substantially different.

(Documents mentioned above are with the Community Council Officer, Shirley Haynes.)

Response from Daniel Fenwick, Acting Director of Governance & Law, on behalf of Cllr. Reardon.

I am the Council's Acting Monitoring Officer and in the absence of Satish Mistry (the Monitoring Officer), I am responsible for monitoring the legality of the Council's decisions and actions.

Your question alleges that the Council did not correctly follow its procedure in respect of the appointment of Lorna Lee to the Post of Head of Libraries, Museum, Archive and Gallery. Ms Lee was originally employed as Head of the Museum, Gallery and Archive Service. This post was graded at PO8. In January 2006, she was asked to undertake additional duties in consideration of an honorarium that took her pay to PO10. This arrangement was lawful and in accordance with Council procedure. It also did not affect the substantive grade of the post of Head of the Museum, Gallery and Archive Service, which remained at PO8.

Ms Lee continued to perform the additional duties until July 2007 and during which time the Council undertook a review of its Museum, Archive & Gallery Service. This review took place in the first quarter of 2007. As a result, a new structure was agreed, which included deletion of the post of Head of the Museum, Gallery and Archive Service. The duties of the Head of the Museum, Gallery and Archive Service were absorbed into the new post of Head of Libraries, Museum, Archive and Gallery graded at PO11/12. This placed Ms Lee into a potential redundancy situation.

Under the relevant employment legislation, the Council owed Ms Lee a duty to consider her for suitable alternative employment, as it would to any employee with sufficient

continuous service. This included the application of its own employment procedures to her situation. You correctly identified the Managing Change Procedure (the Procedure) as the relevant procedure.

The Service considered the procedure and took advice on how to treat Ms Lee. In Ms Lee's case, under the Procedure, the key issue was whether Ms Lee had a "prior claim" to the new post (see 9.1.2) by reason of the additional duties she had undertaken. Paragraph 9.1.2 states that the Council should only "allow staff a prior claim to a job only where they can justify it on clear and objective grounds". Personnel advice was that the fact of Ms Lee's very lengthy undertaking of these additional, relevant duties provided these grounds. This advice was accepted and meant that Ms Lee was treated as a PO10 graded re-deployee.

Under paragraph 9.1.4 and 9.1.5 of the procedure combined, this entitled Ms Lee to a competitive advantage to any suitable post within 1 grade, alongside any other similarly qualified re-deployee. The relevant post was the Head of Libraries, Museum, Gallery and Archive. It did not, however, entitle her to be assimilated into the job without first proving to the Council that she met the essential criteria for the post, see 9.1.4. Therefore, in accordance with paragraph 9.1.4, Ms. Lee was subject to an interview and testing process in May 2007 by a recruitment panel to establish that she was appointable. The panel found this was the case and she was re-deployed into the post.

It is clear that this is an unusual case given the length of the additional duties undertaken by Ms Lee but I am satisfied that the Council acted lawfully at all times. Its interpretation of the Managing Change Procedure was entirely reasonable, having regard to its duty to Ms Lee under employment law but also the interview and testing process also ensured that the Council satisfied itself a suitable person was appointed on merit.

In the course of my investigation, I note that there has been some significant history to the questions asked about Ms Lee's appointment, some of which has been very unpleasant and personal in tone and mixes decisions made by the Council as a corporate body and the role of an individual officer in implementing those decisions. I am pleased to say your correspondence (and I include here the question at the Community Council) is courteous and polite and seeks only to interrogate Council decisions. The Council is willing for its decisions to be robustly scrutinised but reserves its right to protect its employees from unwarranted and misdirected personal abuse.

It is my view that this matter is now closed; a clear and full explanation of Ms Lee's appointment has been provided. You are entitled to disagree with the Council's position but I have advised the relevant officers and members that they should not correspond further on this matter. I am, of course, happy to receive a response from you (including the Community Council) but will not revisit matters I have already investigated in the absence of fresh evidence.

Question 11. M Gold (Bremer Mews): How many books for lending and reference were in the central library before refurbishment? Where are the books now?

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

Before refurbishment there were 45,170 items in Walthamstow Library. This is an estimate based on the best data available from that period. As part of the refurbishment, the service

purchased significant new stock for Walthamstow Library. In line with our stock policy, any books removed from the shelves were sorted according to condition and relevance. Some existing stock, especially for the reference section, was returned to the library following refurbishment. The remaining books were either integrated into the stock at other libraries, placed in storage or identified for disposal. This can be through various routes, such as donation to other libraries, e.g. in residential homes, for sale, or placed for recycling.

Question 12. J Wright (Chewton Road):

1) Why is St James St Library on the list of assets for disposal when the council has still done no consultation with local people – we weren't even told it was going to be closed!

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

The building that previously housed St James Street Library is not on a list of council assets for disposal. Appropriate alternative uses are being considered for this building.

2) Why has the council done nothing to remedy its failure to consult local people about St James St Library, despite being criticised for this by the Audit Commission? Why has no Disability or Equality Impact Assessment still been done? Why does the council still not consult local people about their library needs?

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

The Council has accepted that there are lessons to be learned from the closure of St James Street Library and these include the way in which consultation with the local community is conducted. The disability and equality assessment referred to may form part of plan to close a building but are not expected to be conducted after the service has closed. The Council is in the process of preparing to consult with St James Street Residents about its library service and will be publish the outcome of this exercise when received.

3) Approximately 250,000 books have gone missing from WF libraries in the past few years. Please account for all of these. Have any been destroyed? And specifically, where are the books removed from Central Library before refurbishment?

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

The figure quoted refers to a reduction in the items included on the borough's catalogue, not in books available for loan – it is inaccurate to say that 250,000 books have gone missing. This reduction of items recorded has occurred as a result of a series of stock-checks and exercises to remove items from the catalogue to ensure that the service had an accurate picture of the number of books and other items available for loan. Many of the items that were removed from the catalogue in this exercise had been removed legitimately from the service over previous years but without the catalogue being properly updated. The work undertaken during this exercise to ensure that we have a service that is fit for the future has been recognised by external auditors. The issue of books at Walthamstow library was addressed in question 2 above.

4) Why has the council removed fixed shelving from “refurbished” libraries and reopened them with far fewer books and shelves? Is the long term plan to use

buildings for other purposes as well as libraries? Is the same planned for the borough's other libraries?

Central Library now has no fixed shelving and very few shelves. The same seems to be happening at other libraries? This is what the multimillion "investment" in libraries is being spent on. Please be honest and tell the electorate this is what the council is doing".

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

It is accepted good practice in many library services to have movable shelving. This allows rearrangements of the stock, and also enables us to use the space for related events and activities, e.g. storytelling and discussion groups. As community groups and other service providers use libraries increasingly, e.g. the local health service for information and events relating to cessation of smoking, they need to have a flexible space to meet a multitude of needs. The new shelving also meets the legal requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, which requires there to be full access to the stock, in terms of space between shelves and the height of the shelves.

Before refurbishment there were 45,170 items in Walthamstow Library. This is an estimate based on the best data available from that period. Following refurbishment there were 47,464 items. We have continued to develop the stock at Walthamstow since re-opening.

5) The Managing Change document reveals that a high level appointment (Lorna Lee's promotion) has been made in breach of the council's own policy – whether assimilation or redeployment the appointment fits neither. The council has broken its own rules. How does it remedy this?

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

See response to question 10 above.

Question 12. A Schmidt (Aubrey Road): What is the value (in cover prices) of the books removed from Central Library during refurbishment?

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

Much of the book-stock removed from Walthamstow has been relocated in other libraries. We do not have a record of the 'cover price' of stock, which has been withdrawn from the catalogue

Question 13. S Dlabal (Bishops Close): Why does the council not advertise William Morris Gallery at Walthamstow Central tube station and more widely? Why does the council ignore 10,000 signatures on the petition?

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

We are drawing up a marketing plan to promote the William Morris Gallery and Vestry House Museum. Past experience of promoting related services at the underground station has suggested there has not been a significant impact and is costly.

Question 14. S Kinson (Pretoria Avenue): What research has the council conducted to suggest that a letterbox to return books, a single PC or a GP's receptionist supervising homework are adequate replacements for a library in a deprived area? These have been suggested as replacements for St James St Library.

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

The Library service has been asked by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee to investigate the possibility of a Library Access Point in the St James Street Area. If an access point is established it could include any of the facilities outlined in the question but would not be seen as a replacement for St James Street Library but as an enhancement to the existing library service.

Question 15. M Adams (Upper Walthamstow Road):

1) a) How much have you spent on consultants for the William Morris Gallery and Vestry House Museum this year, 2006, 2005, 2004? Could the information be broken down into years.

b) How much will you spend on consultants next year for the museum and gallery?

c) What are the current consultants employed to do?

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

a) and c) For the first three months of 2004, a consultant was employed to review the library service, which also included some work with the museum and gallery service. No further consultants worked for the service until November 2007 when a consultant firm has been taken on to review the income generation potential at the gallery and museum at a cost of £13, 848. This funding is expected to contribute to increased income to the service in the medium and long-term and is funded from outside the annual revenue budget of the service.

b) There are no further agreed plans to use consultants for the museum and gallery. However as we continue to work towards a Heritage Lottery Fund bid for development of the gallery we will need to use specialists who may be consultants, e.g. to undertake a full conservation survey of the building,

2) Given the response of C Morton to the perceived problem of the "Art Trail" does the council see its job as to actively censor art and its display? And will the council veto the art works in next years Art Trail if it think they oppose the councils view.

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

The Council values art as a means for artists and local people to express the fullest diversity of cultural, social and political expression within the ethos of due impartiality and the law. We would not intentionally permit the exhibition of art works that could be interpreted as racist, sexist or homophobic, nor would the Council facilitate the exhibition of art that may be judged as pornographic in content.

The Council did not veto any art works at this years Art trail and does not envisage doing so at this year's, subject to the above considerations

3) Why did the council make cuts to the museums to save £56,000, then create an additional management position (Head of Libraries, Museum & Galleries) with a salary in excess of £60,000 and consultants in excess of £10,000?

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

The Head of Museum, Gallery and Archives and the Head of Libraries posts were combined as part of the restructure, with a significant overall saving made.

4) When does the council plan to start having wedding ceremonies at the William Morris Gallery? What days of the week will it be available for weddings and which rooms will be used? Will it be open to the public when weddings are taking place?

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

The Council has no immediate plans to hold wedding ceremonies at the Gallery but will consider this option as part of its future plans to increase the use of and income to the Gallery.

Question 16. M Duncan-Jones (James Lane): How many qualified libraries were employed by LBWF in F/Year 2003 / 4, and how many now? How many in 2 years time?

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

There are currently 13 qualified librarians in the service and a further two will soon be joining the service. We are unable to know how many there will be in two years time but we encourage staff to develop their skills and support them gaining.

Question 17. P Tan (Morland Road):

1) The council mentioned that plans were made to close St James Library 2 years ago. But they have not produced reports to that effect. Also MP Neil Gerrard, has no idea of the intention of its closure in 2006.

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

This does not appear to be a question.

2) After all these years, why has the council not put up a notice board to let the public be aware that the building is William Morris Gallery? The notice-board will bring more publicity and income to the Gallery.

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

We have installed a movable sign outside the gallery, which would appear to be bringing in more visitors from the park. We did have a banner on the railings but this was vandalised and disappeared. As part of our marketing review we will be looking at on-site promotion.

Question 18. We should be proud of our heritage and save it rather than dispose of the special treasures. They take years to cultivate and enhance its value. Making the curator redundant in December is just unbelievable and employ 3 unqualified and inexperienced staff is just strange thinking! Peter should be reinstated and other new staff deployed.

Response: Clive Morton, Head of Cultural Services.

This does not appear to be a question.