

## NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### SCRUTINY OF HITCHIN TOWN HALL/ DISTRICT WIDE MUSEUM PROJECT

#### NOTES/ ACTIONS 6<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2018

**PRESENT:** Anthony Roche (Chair); Cllr Lynda Needham; Cllr Martin Stears-Handscomb; Cllr Paul Clark; Cllr Cathryn Henry; Cllr Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg; Jeanette Thompson; Ian Couper; Steve Crowley; Kirstie Wilson

#### OVERVIEW

The above attendees met to discuss the outline approach for the scrutiny review of Hitchin Town Hall and the District Wide Museum Project. Following the meeting's discussions the following conclusions were made.

#### 1. SCOPE OF REVIEW

The scope of the review was agreed as the '**Hitchin Town Hall Project Review: How the Council worked with community partners**'. Within this scope the Council's relationships with voluntary organisations on this project would be included. A positive focus is sought from the review, centred on lessons learnt for future partner working relationships.

#### 2. REVIEW PROCESS

A panel<sup>1</sup> hearing approach was suggested for the review process, with the panel providing a written report of conclusions and recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Due to the potential high number of witnesses available, it was suggested that the panel would do a call for evidence prior to the panel hearing, in the form of witness statements. The panel will then review the statements and from these, decide who they wish to hear from at the hearing. By following this format, it will allow the panel to only select the evidence that fits within the defined review scope.

A period of 2 working days will be timetabled for the panel to hear all the evidence from their selected witnesses. The purpose of the oral evidence sessions is to give the panel the opportunity to ask questions of the witnesses. On completion of this, the panel will review the evidence obtained and write up their report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Throughout the panel hearing period and the subsequent evidence analysis stage, officers will be available to provide additional support, as required. A senior officer will be approached for leading the provision of this officer support (likely to be the Democratic Services Manager), with the Scrutiny Officer co-ordinating the additional support returns to the review panel.

Whether or not the review will be done in the form of a Task and Finish Group or as a separate review process outside of the usual Scrutiny methods is to be decided.

It was noted that this review process is separate to the internal end of project review that will take place under the Council's project management framework, when the project is fully complete.

#### 3. TIMING

The review will begin once full ownership of Hitchin Town Hall is obtained. It is anticipated that this will be achieved by the end of December 2018, with the review able to commence

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<sup>1</sup> This to follow any available guidance – in the absence of which any on task and finish.

shortly after, in the early months of 2019. The review starting promptly once the Council has full ownership of the building was highlighted as being of key importance in the meeting, in order to demonstrate the Council's commitment to stakeholders on investigating the issues associated with this project.

*[NB 1 The Acting Scrutiny Officer will prepare a draft timeline for the review, with it taking place over the 2019 calendar year. The timeline will cover items from the initial approval of scope; the call and gathering for witness statements; the scheduled panel hearing; through to the evaluation and end reports being submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.]*

#### **4. PANEL**

A Panel consisting of 4 Councillors, with an independent chair, to make a total of 5 individuals, was agreed. The membership of the panel will loosely reflect the political proportionality of the authority. The method of selection of the 4 Councillors will be based on those with the necessary investigative skills that will engage constructively and assist in a successful review being achieved. A proposal will be formulated and presented to Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

For the appointment of the independent chair suggestions will be sought for potential candidates. Contact will be made with the Governance Services department for Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, to enquire if their Independent Person, Ian Dobson, would be willing to Chair. All potential individuals identified will be assessed by the Council *[NB2 relevant senior officer in consultation with Group Leaders]* for their suitability in chairing the review.

*[N32 Should a Task and Finish approach be undertaken for the review, there is no formal process for co-option of the independent chair to the panel, as under the Local Government Act 2000 there is no set legal provision for co-option to Task and Finish groups. The process followed however will be transparent in line with best practice recommendations].*

If an independent review, outside of a Task and Finish format, is selected, then this will follow its own specific remit and processes that are best placed for achieving the scope of the review.

Discussion on whether a retainer would be paid to the independent chair then took place, with the attendees agreeing one would likely be required to ensure a chair with appropriate skills and ability would be available to carry out the role.

*[NB4 this to be investigated further.]*

It was agreed that the proposal for this process and the timeline associated with it would be reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee, making clear that the Group Leaders had all been consulted on, and had agreed to, the process.