

CABINET
17 DECEMBER 2019

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

ITEM 6a

**TITLE OF REPORT: ITEM REFERRED FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
23 OCTOBER 2019 – REVIEW OF THE HITCHIN TOWN HALL AND DISTRICT WIDE
MUSEUM PROJECT**

Due to the length of this Minute, this referral has been abridged from the draft Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 23 October 2019. However contains the salient parts of the discussions.

Following the Review into Hitchin Town Hall and District Wide Museum Project, the Independent Chairman of the Panel, Mr John Richardson, presented the report and findings, as attached as the Appendix to this referral.

In presenting the Panel's report, Mr Richardson:

- Thanked the Democratic Services Manager and the Team for the support given during the review process;
- Thanked all those who took part in the review process and the Museum staff, who kept going when times were challenging;
- Explained that the report was aimed at learning and moving forward; and that the report had been produced specifically for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- Although the report and recommendations of the Panel were presented, the importance of the overall process should not be undervalued;
- In referring to the comments of the Leadership Team, which had been attached as Appendix B of the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, noted that the Authority had acted correctly throughout, however, although correctness was vital, it had to be tempered with cooperation and sometimes compromise;
- More than one witness had commented that there was now a new approach to partnership working and hoped that the recommendations were pushing at an open door.

Mr Richardson presented each of the recommendations made by the Panel individually and a lengthy detailed debate and discussion ensued.

The following Members asked questions and took part in the debate regarding each of the recommendations:

- Councillor Claire Strong;
- Councillor David Levett;
- Councillor Jim McNally;
- Councillor Gerald Morris;
- Councillor Val Shanley.

A summary of the discussions and observations in relation to the recommendations was as follows:

Recommendations 1 and 2:

- There had been many experienced members of the community who had given their time, experience and talent to the project;
- The project incorporated the Letchworth and Hitchin museums

Recommendation 3

- That HTH Ltd was a properly constituted charity;
- That understanding how a particular group came to represent the community was a good learning point.

In response to questions Panel Members advised that:

- There were still some questions about exactly how HTH Ltd represented the community;
- How HTH Ltd came into existence became evident through the hearings, but it was likely that residents were unclear as to how that had happened;
- Discernment was very important in understanding, amongst other things, how bodies were formed, what their credentials were and who they represented before entering into a business agreement together.

Recommendation 10

In response to questions the Independent Chairman advised that mediation should have commenced earlier and that all parties needed to sign up to any mediation process.

Members comments included:

- That it should be made clear, at the beginning of an agreement, at which point mediation should start and the procedure;
- That mediation should take place before any party took an entrenched position.

Recommendations 12, 13 and 14

In response to questions the Independent Chairman advised that from evidence heard, Prince II seemed to be a perfectly satisfactory project management tool, however it should not have been quoted as the solution to problems.

Members comments included that:

- Dedicated managers should be appointed to projects and that once appointed, they be able to take complete responsibility;
- Managers of projects should not be placed under pressure and be able to advise senior managers if they required support.

Recommendation 15

In response to questions the Independent Chairman advised that evidence given at the hearings led them to believe that the Project Board meetings did not meet the needs of all partners.

Members comments included that many elements were required for a successful project including an effective project management tool, regular meetings and good communication.

Recommendation 16

The Independent Chairman advised that the sixteenth recommendation was a positive note to conclude.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee expressed thanks to the Independent Chairman and members of the Panel for their work.

Having discussed each recommendation, the Committee had a general debate on the presentations, the report and the Leadership Team comments.

The following Members asked questions and took part in the debate:

- Councillor Kate Aspinwall;
- Councillor Sam Collins;
- Councillor Gerald Morris;
- Councillor George Davies;
- Councillor Kate Aspinwall;
- Councillor Val Bryant;
- Councillor Tom Tyson;
- Councillor Carol Stanier;
- Councillor Claire Strong;
- Councillor Lisa Nash;
- Councillor David Levett;

In response to questions the Independent Chairman advised that many of the recommendations stated the obvious and some should be incorporated into the life of the Council.

The following comments were made by Members:

- That the recommendations needed to be at the forefront of future projects;
- That the recommendation about tone of comments was very important.

The consensus of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was that the comments from Leadership Team should be presented to Cabinet and not to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee agreed that the report and recommendations of the Panel should be presented to Cabinet without amendment however the Committee would present several additional recommendations to Cabinet by way of a referral.

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. Express appreciation to the Independent Chairman of the Hitchin Town Hall Review Panel and Members of the Panel for their hard work in producing the Report.
2. Notes the report of Hitchin Town Hall and District Wide Museum Review Panel (Appendix A) and accepts the recommendations in Part D of the report.
3. Express its profound disappointment that Appendix B of the Report, (Comments of The Leadership Team) was included in the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

1. That the Report of the Hitchin Town Hall Review Panel, (Appendix A) be reviewed and the recommendations, as contained in part D of the report, be accepted.
2. That the following recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be considered:
 - (i) When reviewing the recommendations of the Hitchin Town Hall Review Panel the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be taken into account, particularly the way in which the Council works with Community Groups/Partners;
 - (ii) Ensure that a robust system of mediation is established;
 - (iii) That an effective intervention process is put into place that results in suitable progressive remedial action following any mediation;
 - (iv) That dedicated Project Management is put in place that is adequately resourced as recommended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
 - (v) That a summarised version of the recommendations, (Part D of the Report) is incorporated into all large briefing documents to enable the production of a Code of Conduct which could inform any future projects;
 - (vi) That a clear Intervention Protocol is written and adopted within a reasonable timescale, and included within the Terms of Reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (a separate stand alone paragraph that the Committee will understand to be the process followed when it is deemed necessary for a decision regarding a project is “called in”); and
 - (vii) That the Council’s Procurement Procedures are reviewed as part of the review of the Constitution and continue to be followed and updated regularly to ensure it is adequately robust.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable The Overview and Scrutiny Committee to comment on the review into Hitchin Town Hall and District Wide Museum Project.

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Review Panel of Hitchin Town Hall and District Wide Museum Project.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 23 October 2019

<https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=2317&Ver=4>