

Culture and Leisure meeting at the Sculpture Workshop



Today the Culture and Leisure Committee met away from the confines of the City Chambers in the newly opened Sculpture Workshop in Hawthornvale, which appeared to be a very suitable location for a couple of the councillors who had arrived by bicycle, as the workshop is right beside the cycle path. It posed a little logistical problem for a couple of councillors filling in for other colleagues who then had to hotfoot it back up The Mound for subsequent meetings. Councillor Richard Lewis and Councillor Norma Austin Hart in our photo are respectively the convener and vice-convener of the committee which will be renamed Culture and Sport from the date of the next meeting.

The agenda for the meeting is reproduced for you in full below.

One recurring theme for the councillors on this committee, some of whom are still quite new, is that they feel that they are a little in the dark about how much the budget actually allows by way of spending. In the case of the £80,000 which the council is being asked to spend on the FINA World Diving Series 2013, Councillor Nick Gardner said that he had no idea whether this was a reasonable sum as he did not know the criteria for granting such sums of money, which clearly would not then be spent on something else. The council officer assured him that by the time an event such as the diving comes to the committee it has been through, firstly an application process by the council to FINA, and secondly, 'checks and balances' within the department. The committee feel that the diving competition will allow a welcome dry run before the Commonwealth Games diving competitions the following year.

This will be the first time that the newly renovated Royal Commonwealth Pool (RCP) is to be used for this calibre of competition which should attract Olympic bronze medallist Tom Daley, among others, although it was used as a practice pool for the Olympics in 2012 following its £37million refurbishment.

The committee was largely pleased to hear that 22 libraries across the city are now open on Saturdays, and that other library opening hours have been in place since 1 October. The council officer Susan Mooney confirmed that the staff's working patterns have now been standardised into fewer variations as agreed with the unions. The committee was told that this allows most of the library staff to enjoy a better work-life balance. Councillor Munro questioned the fact that the bill for agency staff had been £200,000 per year, and asked how many permanent posts are being created, but the council officer was not able to clarify this.

Councillor Munro said:-“I am very disappointed that this figure was not in the report, and that there were no exact figures of the number of staff recruited to work in the libraries both full time and part time. This is a good news story, and I feel we are hiding it for some reason. I have no idea why that should be.”



The committee was also asked to ratify the granting of a licence to the Bongo Club of the area underneath the Central Library which is at present only used during the Festival. The council officer expressed the hope that this diversification will be seen as a good thing among their future customers, even though it will not make the council much in the way of revenue. The Bongo Club is a social enterprise linked to Out of the Blue. Councillor Jackson was reassured that the improvements which the new tenant will make to the premises will be strictly monitored and agreed. The lease to the Bongo

Club cannot be granted for a long term because there are plans in the offing for the renovation of the Central Library, and the councillors were advised that the temporary nature of the license has been made very clear during negotiations.

The report about the city's museums was a very positive one, showing that Edinburgh had responded well despite what is known as the Olympic effect, meaning that visitor numbers elsewhere had gone down. The council officer mentioned that the visitor numbers to Nelson's Monument alone have trebled after an exhibition area was installed there. He also mentioned that despite reports in the press the future of the Tron is as yet undecided, and there will be briefings and discussions over the next couple of years to identify what will happen to that building. Councillor Milligan offered a suggestion of including in our museums the turbulent French history involving Mary Queen of Scots and Frank Little the council officer charged with the responsibility of managing the city's Museums said that 'Edinburgh's Story' is one which is included in the Museum of Edinburgh, but agreed it was a good idea.

Finally the meeting was advised that a global sum of £3.2m had been spent by the council on the various Festivals in the city, and this led again to a call for more detail in the figures provided, so that these could be seen in context of historical spending. Councillor Orr apologised for putting his auditor's hat on but suggested this would be more helpful.

The fate of some of the outdoor venues including Inverleith Park was discussed as part of the meeting. It has already been decided that the ATP Tennis tournament which will take place in Edinburgh next year will not be sited in Inverleith and they have already booked alternative accommodation at the Accies ground. No real information about fixing the flooding in Inverleith Park was offered. When looking at the financial figures from Edinburgh Leisure it was clear to the meeting that some facilities had profited from the bad summer weather

and others had not. The council officer explained that all the figures for the Edinburgh Leisure facilities are on their website and so figures for income and visitor numbers are easily accessible to all.

The council officer was not present for the final item on the agenda number 14 which addressed the matter of community access to schools which Councillor Munro appeared disappointed about, and Councillor Fullerton wanted to know how the group who will monitor this short term initiative will be made up. The time limit has deliberately been set quite short so that the scheme to use school buildings out of hours can be fully monitored and assessed before perhaps being rolled out across the city. [We wrote about this yesterday.](#)

Councillor Ron Cairns was the only member of the committee who did not have any questions for officers or comment on the matters in hand.

[Full Meeting Papers 231012-1](#)