**Cultural Services – Portfolio Holder Update (Nov 2016)**

**FFF savings 2016/17 (Target £68,000)**

Cultural Services has a savings target of £68,000 In the FFF Programme for 2016/17. This comprises:

£28,000 (5% savings on discretionary budgets) - this has been achieved by budget managers making small reductions in budgets where there is minimal impact on service to the customer.

£40,000 (Arts Restructure) – the proposals reflect a strengthening of the Programming & Marketing functions within the team which enable the generation of additional income to meet this target.

**Service Plan Performance 2016/17 – Sept update**

**Leisure Development Programme -** Following Executive approval in November 2015 the Leisure Development Programme has progressed largely on schedule. Procurement of an external partner to manage the Council's leisure facilities is now well underway with the target date of early 2017 for the appointment of the preferred contractor, and the start of the new contract on 1st June 2017. A report seeking approval for the investment proposals will be brought to Council on 16th November, and work will commence at Newbold Comyn and St Nicholas Park leisure centres as soon as possible subject to this approval being granted.

Initial scoping and feasibility work on Phase II of the investment proposals (Kenilworth) has commenced. A confidential briefing/consultation took place with Kenilworth Town Council at the end of July to gather views on any "non-starters" or local issues that needed to be considered. The next steps are to carry out a car parking study to understand where extra car parking could be located to serve both Abbey Fields and Castle Farm, and the capacity of such parking; this in turn will then inform the options that officers bring to members next year as the project progresses.

Ongoing communications with leisure centre based staff to ensure that they are fully aware of the process to appoint an external partner, and the impact on their employment. Regular briefing notes are issued after each Programme Board meeting highlighting the key issues, and senior managers have been attending staff meetings at key points to brief the teams and address queries. The trade unions are fully engaged with the process and receive similar briefings.

Alongside the procurement of the management and construction contracts for this work, a review has been undertaken of the staffing structure required to manage the leisure centre and golf contracts, deliver the active communities and outdoor sports services, and lead on the strategic partnerships that are so vital to ensuring that local residents have the best possible opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity in the future. A report will be taken to the December Employment Committee to seek approval for the restructure.

**Arts Review –** As scheduled in the FFF Programme a review commenced in April to consider alternative staffing structure to deliver the "Arts" elements of the service area. This includes the Art Gallery & Museum at the Royal Pump Rooms, the Royal Spa Centre, Town Hall and the Arts Development service. This review was preceded by the completion of a review of the Council's Arts Strategy and the refocusing of the objectives for the service. The revised Arts Strategy has been a key document in informing the direction of the service and the consequent proposals for merging

the Art Gallery and Museum with the "entertainment" elements of the service. Initial proposals were circulated to the teams in late August, with the intention of a report being taken to the December Employment Committee to seek approval for the restructure.

**Strategic projects** – the team continue to work with partners to progress a number of strategic projects including:

- Kenilworth Wardens relocation to Castle Farm subject to the outcome of the Local Plan and the development of Wardens current site at Thickthorn.
- Europa Way and the delivery of a community stadium in partnership with Leamington FC.
- Expansion of Myton School and the extension of sports facilities on the site

**AG&M -** the Art Gallery & Museum continues to be a popular destination for local people and visitors alike with over 112,000 visitors in 2015/16. This represents a small reduction on visitors compared to the previous year which is due to a number of factors including the reduced opening hours for the VIC and the loss of heating throughout the building for most of March 2016 following the flooding of the plant room. The first 6 months of this year suggest that attendance figures have risen again. Highlights since April have included Museums at Night: The Roaring Twenties (14 May) and three temporary exhibitions with a strong local focus, Through the Shop Window (30 January – 17 April), Simon Lewty: The Significance of Writing (29 April – 10 July) and Concealment & Deception: The Art of the Camoufleurs of Leamington Spa 1939-1945 (22 July – 16 October).

**Arts Development** – the service continues to support a wide range of arts projects ranging from national arts organisations based in the district (eg Motionhouse and Armonico) to local community arts groups. The service provides professional support for these organisations, small scale financial support through the Arts Grants scheme, and advocacy for the role of "the Arts" and how it can make a significant contribution to the quality of life for local residents. Highlights of the current year include the Arts Active project being delivered in a number of primary schools in partnership with Warwick Arts Centre, Poetry Voices, the growth of Motionhouse Youth, and the ongoing support of local artistic activities through the Arts Grants scheme.

**Royal Spa Centre** - the venue attracted over 92,000 visitors in 2015/16 and enjoyed one of the most financially successful pantomime seasons ever, with over 20,000 people attending and attracting some of the best feedback ever received.

This year, the team have continued to build on that achievement and the Spring season has been immensely successful - with a significant increase in attendance and box office income. This has been due to a diversification of the programme- comedians and lecturers proving to be especially popular. There have been many sold out performances, including the Ukulele Orchestra, Eddie Izzard, Talon, That'll be The Day, An Audience with Ian Waite and Natalie Lowe (Strictly Come Dancing), Rob Beckett (comedian) and Jimmy Carr). As a result over 7,000 more people purchased tickets for events at the Spa Centre compared to the same period last year.

The cinema continues to perform well – the live screenings being particularly well attended (Bolshoi Ballet, National Theatre Live, Glyndebourne and the 'Discover Arts' series (which included a live screening of a performance by Andre Rieu). This season also saw increased use of the cinema by

community groups to screen specialist films - with the Polish community showing Polish language films and the Indian community screening Bollywood films.

The venue hosted 40 community events between April and July which were equally successful – some of the performances of note were a spectacular production of Singing in the Rain by Leamington & Warwick Musical Society, the Warwickshire Book Awards and the Multi Cultural Showcase.

During the summer closure, essential maintenance works were undertaken including the installation of new stage lighting dimmers and stage motors which are essential to the safe and professional operation of the venue (Executive report June 2016). Whilst the benefits of these systems will not be immediately obvious to the public, the investment significantly reduces the business risk to the venue and the equipment installed is the first of its kind in a venue of our size in the UK, future proofing the operation for years to come.

**Leisure Centres** – whilst the Leisure Development Programme has been continuing behind the scenes, the teams at the leisure centres have been continuing to provide quality sports and leisure services across the Councils facilities. In 2015/16 the leisure centres achieved over 260,000 swimmers and over 90,000 gym users in addition to others playing a range of sports through club or social activities. Income was 2% up on budget with over £540,000 of direct debit gym memberships have been processed during the year. The focus on actions to maximise income and control expenditure has remained a key priority for this financial year. Subject to a decision being made on the investment proposals at Newbold and St Nicholas Park, there will be significant impact on customers and the team will be doing everything they can to maintain a service during the works and ensuring clear communication with customers with details of when facilities are open and operational. There is a positive message for the community relating to the investment proposals and we intend to build on this during the building phase to ensure that we have the best possible public response when the refurbishment work is complete in 2017.

**Risk Management**

The key service risks are currently considered to be:

**Plant Failure** – ageing plant which is nearing the end of its life. Failure of such plant could have a significant impact on services delivered from our key buildings. A schedule for replacement has been developed by Housing and Property Services. The replacement of the dimmers and motors at the Spa Centre has reduced the risk at this site, and the planned replacement of significant elements of the leisure centre plant as part of the investment proposals will reduce the risk at these sites to.

**Golf Contract** – Economic pressures and a national decline in participation in golf pose challenges in delivering a successful and quality service. Officers continue to work with the contractor to identify solutions to the issues. The Portfolio Holder, Deputy Chief Executive and Head of Cultural Services met with Mack Golf on 13th Oct and a verbal update will be provided at the meeting.

**Building risks at Royal Pump Rooms** – flood risk and roof leaks continue to be a concern at this venue. Housing and Property Services are aware of the roof leaks and are developing a strategy that can be implemented once the long term future of the building has been confirmed. Periods of heightened flood risks are managed through the implementation of emergency flood protection

procedures. The possibility of protecting the art collection from flood risk by creating a store at another suitable property is currently being investigated.

**Procurement of leisure operator** – staff in the leisure centre team have experienced and will continue to experience, a period of unsettlement which has led to some staff choosing to leave their positions at the leisure centres. The uncertain future of the service means that recruitment of staff to fill these vacancies has been challenging.

**Looking ahead and Strategic Plans**

There are 2 key areas that will have a significant impact on the future shape of this service.

**The Leisure Development Programme** with its various strands will mean that the Council's sports and leisure service look very different within 2 years. Members have taken some bold decisions to date which mean that we now have an exciting opportunity to improve our facilities, make them appropriate for the growing population of the district, and protect the provision of sports and leisure in the district for the next 30 years or so. We are looking to invest significant sums to achieve this, but any decision needs to be taken in the knowledge that these changes will result in an increase in participation, improved health and well being of local people, and a reduction in the subsidy from the Council to continue to provide these services.

The second key area is the ongoing debate around the **future use of our assets**. The Royal Pump Rooms and Town Hall are challenging assets to maintain, and are therefore costly for the Council to retain. Decisions around their future use will have a significant impact on the delivery of our Arts and Heritage service, and to the role of the Town Hall. The decision to progress the new Council HQ has provided some clarity around the future civic demands on the Town Hall and work is progressing to consider alternative uses for this asset. The future of the Royal Pump Rooms is linked to decisions made on the Creative Quarter project; related to this are work streams considering the future of the Visitor Information Centre in the Royal Pump Rooms and discussions about the plans for catering provision in the venue on the end of the Kudos catering contract in Feb 2018.

In the meantime work is ongoing across the service to respond to the following key drivers:

**Income generation:**

Following on from the success of last years This Girl Can campaign a scheme in Kenilworth has targeted women with medical conditions who on referral from their GP have attended supported sessions at Abbey Fields pool with the intention of giving them the confidence to continue at the end of their allocated sessions. A second tranche of referrals started in September.

Plans have been implemented to retain swimming lesson, school and club income during the anticipated building works later this year by relocating bookings from St Nicholas Park to the other pools for the autumn/spring term. This ensures uninterrupted service and protects income.

The box office income at the Royal Spa Centre continues to over perform and is the best seen in many years. Total gross box office income has increased by £154k compared to the same period last year. Advance sales also continue to be high – especially sales for the pantomime which are

following the successful trend of last year. As always the performance of the pantomime is crucial to the Spa Centre's financial targets, but the early signs are extremely promising.

**Service Improvement:**

Managers are working on the development of an improved "Customer service" culture in all our facilities, providing staff with the skills to improve the customer experience and make them more likely to return.

Clear performance targets for teams are being developed which will contribute to the overall quality of service delivery.

There has been a growth of "community engagement" activities at the Art Gallery & Museum with successful projects with groups with disabilities and an ongoing project with a local dementia group.

The well established and successful GP Referral Scheme has continued to develop through the countywide partnership, and has recently expanded in the number of referrals and the conditions included in the scheme.

Cllr Michael Coker (Portfolio Holder for Culture)

October 2016