

Environmental & Community Services Select Committee

21 January 2015 – At a meeting of the Select Committee held at 2.15 pm at County Hall, Chichester.

Present:

Mr Barrett-Miles	Mr G Jones	Mr S Oakley
Mr Circus	Mr M Jones	Mr Tyler (Chairman)
Dr Dennis	Mrs Phillips	Mr Whittington

In attendance by invitation:

- Mr Brown (Cabinet Member for Finance)
- Ms Goldsmith (Leader and portfolio holder for the economy)
- Mr Hunt (Local Member for Chichester North and Cabinet Member for Education and Skills)

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Mrs Brunsdon
- Mr R Oakley
- Mr J Rogers (Vice Chairman)

Declarations of Interest

145. In accordance with the Code of Conduct the following personal interests were declared:-

- Mr Hunt – Item 3 (Call-in) as a Member of the Friends of the Weald and Downland Museum
- Mr Oakley – Item 3 as a Member of Chichester District Council

Call-in

146. Mr M Jones introduced the request to call-in the decision by the Leader concerning the Kickstart Funding for the Weald and Downland Museum (call-in request appended to the signed minutes) and highlighted the following points:-

- His understanding was that Kickstart funding was allocated to projects identified as local priorities by District and Borough Councils and strategic initiatives such as broadband, and was not meant as a funding stream for businesses who approached the County Council needing monies for particular projects.
- There was concern about the lack of transparency surrounding the decision process as the decision was signed by the Leader but did not include a record of her declaration of interest as a Member of the Friends of the Weald and Downland Museum.
- It was felt that consideration should have been given to providing some of the unallocated Kickstart funding to foodbanks.
- There was a lack of clarity regarding the management of the Kickstart funding budget as the last update to the Committee, provided in June 2014, had been presented by the Cabinet Member for Finance not the Leader.
- There was concern that a letter had been sent to the Museum on the 29 October 2014 (copy appended to the signed minutes) indicating that the County Council would be allocating it £100,000 from the Kickstart budget. This letter was sent despite the fact that the decision had not been published or the call-in period cleared.

- A member of County Council staff had been seconded to the Museum but the costs of this post were being borne by the County Council.
- The combined funding made available via Kickstart and Be the Business over the 2013-14 and 14-15 period was greater than the value of cuts made to services such as Highways and the Fire and Rescue Service. Although these funding schemes were intended to stimulate the economy in the County there was concern that it was hard to see any direct results.

147. The Cabinet Member for Finance addressed the Committee, providing justification for the decision and highlighted the following points: -

- The Leader had asked the Cabinet Member to review the request to award funding to the Weald and Downland Museum, due to the fact that she had a declarable personal interest, being a Friend of the Weald and Downland Museum. The Cabinet Member had agreed that it was an appropriate amount to award; however, due to an administrative error, the Leader signed the decision for the allocation of funding.
- The Kickstart programme was originally created in 2011 during the economic downturn and its purpose was to stimulate economic growth and employment.
- The £100,000 allocation from Kickstart would assist the Weald and Downland Museum in securing a £4 million Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) Award. This would result in the safeguarding of existing jobs and creation of new ones, increased visitor numbers generating a projected extra £¼ million pounds for the West Sussex economy and the continued delivery of a varied educational programme ranging from school visits to Masters degree courses.
- The decision to agree the secondment of a member of staff to the museum was made by the then Chief Executive of the County Council. The intention was this employee would help develop the bid to the HLF. A decision to extend this secondment included the requirement that the museum contributed to the wage cost.
- In June 2014, on receiving an update on the Kickstart programme, the Select Committee had commented that the 'light touch' approach was good for partner relations and resolved that local members be kept informed of the progress of schemes in their areas. This approach had been followed in making the decision in relation to the Weald and Downland Museum, with the local member kept informed throughout.
- There was still £140,000 unallocated monies in the Kickstart fund and, to make best use of this, the Cabinet Member was minded to either transfer this to the Be the Business fund or the Members' Big Society Fund.
- As the economy was improving it was not intended to carry on with Kickstart in the new financial year. However if the economy declined again in the future the County Council may consider a similar scheme.

148. The local Member, Jeremy Hunt, addressed the Committee and explained that: -

- He had been kept fully informed about the proposal to allocate Kickstart funding to the Weald and Downland Museum from the point when initial discussions about the project started with the Museum.
- The Museum was well-respected nationally and attracted tourists from all over the world, however 80% of tourists came from within an hour's drive, meaning a large number would be West Sussex residents.

- The Museum was an income generator for the West Sussex economy as £1.56 was generated for every £1.00 spent at the Museum. Its location also meant it was beneficial for the rural economy.
- As Cabinet Member for Education and Skills he welcomed the positive educational benefits the Museum offered.

149. The Leader declared a personal interest as a Member of the Friends of the Weald and Downland Museum and advised that the initial visit to the Museum to learn about the project and funding request occurred in July 2014, so this proposal had been considered over a long period. It was purely an administrative error that she had signed the decision.

150. The following points were raised in discussion; Members: -

- Queried whether there was a lack of clarity with regard to what happened to residual funds that were left in a budget at year-end. *The Cabinet Member for Finance indicated that it was a very transparent process in that any unspent monies would revert to the central budget which could either be transferred to reserves or re-allocated to another use. Any decision which occurred in relation to re-allocation of funds for another use was clearly published in the Total Performance Monitor.*
- Asked whether Chichester District Council had identified this project as one of their identified priorities for Kickstart Funding. *The Cabinet Member confirmed they had not and that the Museum had made an approach for funding direct.*
- Queried whether other organisations were made aware of the residual funds in the Kickstart budget, and given the opportunity to apply for them, or if the Museum just happened to be 'in the right place at the right time.' *The Cabinet Member confirmed that there was no publicity about the remaining funding, in accordance with the aim of having a 'light touch' approach; in this respect the Museum were 'in the right place at the right time.' However the decision had not been taken in haste, as the initial meeting with the Museum about this matter had occurred in July and the decision not taken until December.*
- Requested clarification regarding whether any other projects, not identified by the District or Borough Councils as local priorities, received funding from the Kickstart Programme. *Duncan Barrett, Strategic Manager, Economy Group, confirmed that there were.*
- Queried the accuracy of the projected benefits of the Weald and Downland Museum improvement project, in terms of increased employment and additional income generated. *Peter Lewis, Executive Director Corporate Resources and Services, indicated that they had depended on the information provided by the museum regarding the projected benefits; although this would have been scrutinised by the HLF as part of the bid analysis process. The Cabinet Member added that it was important not to confuse the number of additional jobs created with the full time equivalent (FTE) projections. Additional job figures would account for each job individually, including the numerous part time jobs at the Museum, whereas FTE projections would amalgamate all jobs to create a figure for the number of full time equivalent posts.*
- Were, in general, supportive of the funding being provided to the Weald and Downland Museum.

151. Mr M Jones made a number of recommendations which the Committee considered. The following recommendation was seconded by Dr Dennis :-
In view of the fact that there is no record of the Cabinet considering this in October 2014, in future such discussions on spending decisions should be minuted appropriately, and that undertakings to outside organisations about funding should not be made without stating that this is subject to the decision having been made and the call-in period has passed.
A vote was held and the proposal was lost.
152. Resolved that: The Committee supports decision LDR 12 (14/15) that £100k of the unallocated Kickstart budget be allocated to support the Weald & Downland Museum 'Gateway Project' proposals.

Date of the Next Meeting

153. The Committee noted that the next scheduled meeting will be held on 25 February 2015 at 10.30am.

The meeting ended at 3.40pm

Chairman.