

# Scrutiny Committee

## Review of the Business & Conference Centre (Formerly the Banqueting Suite)



### Draft Final Report – February 2018

For discussion at Scrutiny Committee – 8 March 2018

#### Task Group:

- ▶ Councillor Sue Jones (Chair)
- ▶ Councillor Colin Coulton
- ▶ Councillor Michael Green
- ▶ Councillor Keith Martin
- ▶ Councillor Mick Titherington
- ▶ Councillor Matthew Tomlinson
- ▶ Councillor Karen Walton

## What is Scrutiny?

Scrutiny is all about challenging decisions made by the Council and other local organisations, keeping an eye on local issues and reviewing local policies.

In other words, Scrutiny acts like a watchdog for the people of South Ribble. It is about helping the council to work with local people, partners, other businesses and organisations and voluntary and community groups, to improve the quality of life of residents in the borough.

## Scrutiny:

**Challenges** local performance so that we can raise standards, ensuring the services provided meet customers' expectations;

**Questions** the decisions of the Council's cabinet and other local organisations;

**Reviews** policies and becomes involved in the development of new policies;

**Holds inquiries** and reviews services provided by public organisations on issues of public interest or concern e.g. local hospitals, the police, fire service, utility companies etc.

**Makes recommendations** for action, change and improvement.

## Who is Scrutiny?

Scrutiny is made up of twelve members of the Council who are appointed by all members of the council on an annual basis.

## How can you get involved?

Local people and organisations have an important part to play in the Scrutiny process. If you use a service it is important that you let your councillors know your views on how it could be improved.

You can do this in a number of ways:

- ▶ Attend meetings
- ▶ Suggest a topic
- ▶ Get involved in a consultation

You could be asked for your views on an issue or be invited to provide specialist knowledge you have by being a witness in a Scrutiny review or by being co-opted onto one of the task groups.

## More information?

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# Chair's Foreword

I was pleased to take this review forward after chairing ***'Mind the Gap – Scrutiny Review of Loneliness and Social Isolation'*** in 2015, which recommended greater use of the Banqueting Suite.



The Scrutiny Committee has taken a keen interest in the use of the Banqueting Suite since the business transformation exercise in 2013, which saw the usage of the facilities reduce significantly and limited work to make the most of this important council asset.

Fast forward to 2018 and another Scrutiny Task Group is reporting on progress for the newly named Business and Conference Centre. After five years I think I can safely say that we have experienced impatience, confusion and often frustration about a “lack of pace” with this situation.

This report, I believe, brings fresh hope and ambition and excitement about the future of this valuable facility.

Our review of the Banqueting Suite not only had the aims of ensuring more effective use of the space and to see improvement, but to consider the Council's approach to project management, income generation and approach to change.

Throughout this review we have tried to be as inclusive as possible and spoken with all relevant stakeholders. We are grateful to Members and staff for meeting with us and giving their views.

We hope this report and our recommendations will help the Council with phase 1 and 2 of the Business and Conference Centre proposals.

I would like to thank my fellow Task Group members for their wisdom, time and effort in ensuring that this review achieved its objectives and has reported in a timely way. Thanks also to our Scrutiny Manager, Darren Cranshaw, for his hard work and valuable expertise.

We commend the report and look forward to witnessing the Council advancing confidently into a new era of community and business involvement with the Business and Conference Centre.

Councillor Sue Jones  
Task Group Chair  
*On behalf of the Scrutiny Task Group*

## **Rationale for the Review**

The Scrutiny Committee has taken an interest in the operation of the Banqueting Suite since the Commercial Services Transformation was agreed by Cabinet in 2013 as part of its general monitoring role.

Since then the Scrutiny Review of Loneliness and Social Isolation in 2015 made recommendations about the use and charging policy of the Banqueting Suite by community groups. An informal review was conducted by Scrutiny Members in 2016.

Due to continued Scrutiny Member concerns the Scrutiny Committee asked for a current situation report with regards the Banqueting Suite, which was presented on 27 November 2017, where it was agreed to set up a Scrutiny Review.

In response to a motion at Full Council on 17 January 2018, it was agreed to incorporate consideration of Member refreshments provided prior to meetings as part of this Scrutiny review.

## **Scrutiny Committee Review Team**

- ▶ Councillor Sue Jones (Chair)
- ▶ Councillor Colin Coulton
- ▶ Councillor Michael Green
- ▶ Councillor Keith Martin
- ▶ Councillor Mick Titherington
- ▶ Councillor Matthew Tomlinson
- ▶ Councillor Karen Walton

## **Review Aims and Objectives**

1. To gain confirmation of the Cabinet's vision and plans for the future development and use of the Banqueting Suite.
2. Explore the vision and plans to ensure they are based on robust evidence, consultation and data.
3. Test the business model and pricing policy for the Banqueting Suite.
4. Review the project planning documentation to ensure it is SMART (specific, measureable, achievable, realist and timebound).

5. Agree the monitoring arrangements for Scrutiny to ensure the project objectives and milestones are met.
6. To decide how best to deal with Full Council's request to review Member refreshments prior to meetings.
7. Consider best practice.
8. Make relevant recommendations to the Cabinet.

## **Links with Corporate Priorities and Corporate Plan**

The review links with the Council's Corporate Plan 2017-2018

### **Corporate Priority:**

- ▶ Strong and Healthy Communities
- ▶ Efficient, effective and exceptional council

### **Corporate outcome:**

- ▶ Increased use of an income from existing property assets and investments.

## **Methodology**

The Task Group has carried out extensive research to inform their review and ensure that as many people as possible could get involved in the review:

- ▶ The Task Group carried out desktop research reviewing best practice from other Scrutiny reviews carried out by other councils around the country.
- ▶ The Task Group reviewed key documentation to set the context for the review including:
  - Cabinet report on Commercial Services Transformation
  - Extract of previous reports and minutes presented to Scrutiny Committee
  - Project planning methodology and documentation
  - Centre for Public Scrutiny information
  - Presentation slides
- ▶ The Task Group has met on 6 occasions at the end of January and during February to carry out the review meeting with a selection of key Members and officers:

- Councillor Colin Clark, Cabinet Member for Corporate Support & Assets
- Jonathan Noad, Extended Leadership Team Lead
- Howard Anthony, South Ribble Partnership Manager

- ▶ A focus group was held with members of staff who service the facility.
- ▶ A focus group was held with the new project team
- ▶ The Task Group also had a tour of the facilities

## **Key Findings**

The Task Group has used all the research mentioned in the above methodology to come up with the following key findings that have been used in developing recommendations for the review.

- ▶ The Task Group found limited progress made with the project since the last update to the Scrutiny Committee in November 2017. However, progress has now been accelerated.
- ▶ A new vision and approach to the Banqueting Suite as a Business and Conference Centre is planned.
- ▶ The Cabinet Member is a driving force behind the vision for the facility and has started to ensure that the project is planned with pace.
- ▶ The project has been broken down into 2 phases. Phase 1 is around carrying out a refurbishment of the conference facilities to modernise them using the £80,000 budget already allocated some years ago.
- ▶ A project team has been created and has met on 3 occasions.
- ▶ The project team has a good selection of skills and experience who are all enthusiastic about the project.
- ▶ There is concern as to whether the project team has the capacity to deliver this project alongside the Worden Hall project and their own day jobs.
- ▶ The project team has developed a scope, with some milestones, but more detailed project planning documentation has not been made available. The Cabinet is yet to agree phase 1 of the project.
- ▶ There has been some engagement with employees who service the facility and stakeholders. It would be helpful to the project if further consultation and

involvement with stakeholders was carried out.

- ▶ Ideas for phase 2 of the project are available, which would potentially mean major physical changes to the facility and expansion of the business model. Currently there is no timescale for bringing phase 2 forward.
- ▶ Following Council asking the Task Group to review the Member refreshments prior to Council and committee meetings we have undertaken research into the cost and potential options available. We feel a more objective assessment should be carried out by the Member Remuneration Panel as part of its wider work and we will pass our research onto the panel.

## **Recommendations**

1. Commends the Cabinet Member for his ambitions and acting as a catalyst for this project being taken forward.
2. Welcomes that a project scope has been developed for phase 1 of the project and asks that a more detailed project plan be developed utilising the Council's new projects and performance management system. This should include preparation of a risk register and communications plan.
3. A detailed project and business plan for phase 1 is presented to Cabinet as soon as possible for approval.
4. The phase 2 business plan and project documentation be presented to the Scrutiny Committee for comment and Cabinet for approval in October to inform the 2019/2020 budget process.
5. An assessment of the capacity needed to deliver phase 1 of the project in addition to other projects and the project team members 'day jobs' be carried out to ensure appropriate resources are provided.
6. An engagement strategy is developed to consult and involve frontline employees delivering the service and customers throughout the Civic Centre and surrounding area.
7. Consideration is given to whether external support is required to carry out a market assessment to test the proposed business plan being developed.
8. Quarterly reports are presented to the Scrutiny Committee as part of the new style corporate performance reports being provided.



9. The Independent Member Remuneration Panel be asked to make a recommendation to Council as part of their wider work as to whether refreshments should continue to be provided prior to Council and committee meetings.