

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Monday, 3 December 2018

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Michael Downing (Chair), Lloyd Briscoe, Jim Brown, David Cullen, James Fraser, Lizzy Kelly, Sarah-Jane Potter and Simon Speller

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 7.15pm

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr M Hurst, A McGuinness and A Mitchell.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - 12 NOVEMBER 2018**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Environment and Economy Select Committee meeting held on 12 November 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 **UPDATE ON EXECUTIVE MEMBER RESPONSE TO INDOOR MARKET SCRUTINY REVIEW**

The Assistant Director (Stevenage Direct Services) provided an update on the Executive Member response to the Indoor Market Scrutiny Review. The Principal Recommendation was to request officers to engage an external company to carry out market research in order to find out what kind of market offer is required by the Town in the long term. Members were informed that quotations for the market research were expensive. The Council had commissioned the cost effective option of a feasibility study for future business development options or diversification through a specialist company called Spacemakers. Spacemakers have delivered a number of projects across the Greater London Authority and had delivered the transformation project for the Brixton Market.

A draft report had been received from Spacemakers and this was now under consideration. Members were informed that Stevenage Direct Services was working in collaboration with Regeneration and Communities and Neighbourhoods on future plans for the Indoor Market.

Members indicated that future plans for the Indoor Market must take into consideration the changing demographics of the Town and workers who commute to

the town. The Assistant Director confirmed that Spacemakers had been contracted to look at the options for the Indoor Market. The Indoor Markets team appreciated the different location and clientele settings for Brixton and Stevenage.

Officers had followed up on the short term recommendation to approach retailers to see what incentives would be required to restore access to the multi-storey car park. Retailers had not responded to invitations to make proposals regarding access to the Indoor Market. Retailers appeared not to have an appetite to reinstate public access to the Indoor Market. It was noted that retailers did not appear to have an appetite to reinstate public access due to previous shoplifting cases related to the access. The Council will continue to engage the retailers on this issue using all options including discussions relating to regeneration. Members were informed that significant public realm works had been completed at Market Place and Park Place and this would hopefully improve access routes for all Indoor Market customers. The Portfolio Holder (Resources) also highlighted the issue of step access to the Indoor Market.

With regard to the recommendation to improve the fabric of the building, it was indicated that officers were appraising potential options to improve the fabric of the market building. Findings and recommendations arising from the Spacemakers report will be incorporated into a business plan. This will be used to support a future capital bid for works to upgrade the internal fabric of the indoor market. It was noted that improvements had been done on the building in the past. Members highlighted the inconsistencies in stall design features. It was reported that due to financial constraints, all capital bids had to be supported by a business case. Projects were funded in accordance with business case priority.

After initially taking a more robust line with operating hours, and after taking into consideration feedback from traders, the Council is now reviewing this stance with a view of introducing some degree of flexibility to opening times. Members highlighted the change in shopping habits and the variety of shopping options available to customers. Members were informed that there was an even split between traders who preferred the current arrangement of fixed opening times on four days and those who in favour of flexible working hours. Security arrangements will be a key factor in determining the future schedule for the Indoor Market.

Members were informed that Town Centre and Indoor Market events are aligned to the free parking sessions provided by the Council. The 30 minute parking pilot is still in place. The Council is currently drafting a Parking Strategy. The Council had not carried out an analysis to determine whether the free parking spaces had boosted sales at the indoor market. Plans are in place to have a public mobile Wi-Fi network in the Town Centre. This will enable the Council to get estimates of the number of visitors to the market. It was noted that the free parking provision is not an incentive for those customers that rely on public transport. In response to a question, the Assistant Director stated that the Council is considering options such running a community transport service to the Indoor Market, public transport drop off points close to the Indoor Market and offering discounts and vouchers that can be used at the Indoor Market.

The Council recommendation to co-ordinate town centre and indoor market events is

being implemented in full. There is an annual town centre programme of events that includes specific market focussed events. Traders continue to have access to a marquee for promotion of the Indoor Market and free town centre pitch licences. It was pointed out that some continental traders were reluctant to set up stalls in the town centre due to concerns about business prospects. The Portfolio Holder indicated that play centre facilities at Market Place and Park Place were likely to attract customers to the Indoor Market. It was noted that trade in the Indoor Market could be boosted by the two access points to Market Place and Park Place.

The Indoor Market team is committed to attracting a wide diversity of traders at the market. The Council still holds regular meetings with the indoor market traders regarding publicity and other issues. Members were informed that the current group of traders were of a mixed age profile. A number of senior traders had retired in recent months but a significant number of stalls were being run by young traders. Initiatives such as the 28-day licence were in place to attract new and young traders to the market.

Officers had considered the recommendation to offer staggered rents for new traders. It was concluded that the option was not viable due to the complexity and variety of trading scenarios. Businesses that may be experiencing financial problems can apply for the struggling trader rate. If trading accounts confirm feasibility issues, a trader will be offered up to six months reduced rents. The casual trader option has been rebranded as "Pop Up Stalls". This option is proving to be popular with traders. Members were informed that on average, the reduced rate was one-third cheaper than the unsubsidised rate over a six-month period. Current indoor market rents were still below rates that were payable before the introduction of rent cuts in 2011. The reduced rent option had been beneficial to traders and it had enabled some traders to grow and set up stand-alone shops in the town centre and elsewhere in the town. Members suggested that Indoor Market plans be aligned to the Co-operative Council agenda. In addition to financial considerations, the Council should also take into account the social benefits of the market. It was noted that the Indoor Market could potentially provide opportunities for small franchises and some young traders who were currently operating from private properties. The Assistant Director acknowledged that the Indoor Market would benefit from projects related to the Borough's cultural strategy and the strengthening of links with the Business and Technology Centre (BTC) and collateral business opportunities.

Members were informed that officers consult traders from different markets and settings for best practice advice. The Council continues to benefit from new advice and innovative solutions from the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA) and similar organisations.

It was indicated that officers are currently considering options for alternative uses of void spaces. The options included setting up art, craft demonstrations and cake stalls next to food and drink stalls. A BTC-based business support social enterprise (Wenta) will hold business advice clinics at the Indoor Market for one day a month from January 2019. A number of new traders have been secured since the last review.

Members were informed that with regard to:

- a) Long Term Recommendation 1 – The relocation of the Indoor Market is currently not considered to be a viable option. The recommendation will continue to be reviewed as plans for the town centre regeneration develop. Traders had also expressed concerns about the current location of the market. It was acknowledged that the Indoor Market was isolated from major business activities in the town centre. Some traders had suggested that the market be relocated to a more central and easily accessible location in town centre. The Assistant Director informed the Committee that the Council also had to take into consideration the views of investors on the location of the Indoor Market. The Council had introduced initiatives such display boards in the town centre and at the market and a dedicated website for the indoor market as a way of boosting trade.
- b) Long Term Recommendations 2 – An alternative location for a smaller reconfigured indoor market has not been identified or considered viable at this point. It was noted that having permanent stalls in the town centre arcade would provide direct competition to the current indoor market traders and this would make the indoor market less viable. Town centre regeneration is likely to bring new opportunities for indoor market traders. Members suggested that the recommendation be revisited after the town centre regeneration.
- c) Long Term Recommendations 3 – The Council has not considered the option to approach an independent company to administrate the indoor market on a commercial basis. It was agreed that an independent market administration company would drive hard to maximise profits and not give as much attention to social benefits of the market. The Assistant Director confirmed that the Council will review the applicability of this option in future.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- 1. That the Executive Member response be noted
- 2. That an update on the Spacemakers Indoor Market feasibility study and proposed upgrades to the Indoor Market be provided to the Economy and Environment Select Committee after an officer review of the report

4 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

5 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

6 **PART II MINUTES - 12 NOVEMBER 2018**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the Environment and Economy Select Committee meeting held on 12 November 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to amending the date of the Environment and Economy

Select Committee meeting from Monday 3 October 2018 to Monday 12 November 2018.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR