

**Cheltenham Borough Council**

**Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee -  
5<sup>th</sup> March, 2003**

**Matters referred to Committee by the Cabinet**

**Extract of Cabinet Minutes - 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2003**

**Art Gallery and Museum**

The Deputy (Health, Wellbeing and Economy) explained that following her announcement to Cabinet on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2002, this report reviewed the existing proposal to commission an extension to the Art Gallery and Museum in the light of two principal factors:-

- the council's medium term financial projections
- the decision of the Planning Committee on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2002 to reject the current design proposals for the extension

The report concluded that although the need for additional and improved exhibition space remained unmet, budgetary provision for the council's share of the costs had never been agreed and it was no longer realistic to proceed on the assumption that the council will provide in excess of £2 million as its contribution towards the costs of the project.

The Deputy (Health, Wellbeing and Economy) suggested that rather than abandon the project completely, a working party should be set up to research alternative options to meet the improvement needs of the Art Gallery and Museum and to report back to Cabinet in September 2003. She expressed her considerable regret that she had to recommend the abandonment of a scheme which had enjoyed broad cross-party support over many years, and which was self evidently a desirable project. The need for better display areas, identified several years ago could only become more pressing as the collections grew. Furthermore, an extended and redesigned Art Gallery was likely to be a significant component of the Council's civic realm aspirations built into the Civic Pride proposals. Such an extended Art Gallery facility would provide the necessary focus for the meaningful development of a cultural quarter in this area of the town centre.

The Deputy (Health, Wellbeing and Economy) indicated other possibilities which could be explored included looking at non-traditional funding routes such as charitable trusts, or even returning to the discussions with the County Council around their use of the library and its limitations.

The suggested brief would be "to investigate fully all alternative means to secure additional exhibition space and improved facilities for the Art Gallery, as outlined in paragraph 5.2 of the report".

The Deputy (Health, Wellbeing and Economy) suggested the working party should be chaired by herself and that membership should include:

- two representatives of the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- at least one representative of the Friends of the Art Gallery and Museum
- Group Director (Social and Community)
- Other officers as required - to keep the project group manageable

The Deputy (Performance and Support Services) acknowledged that the Deputy (Health, Wellbeing and Economy) had inherited a very difficult problem. He suggested that the Council needed to learn lessons based on experience to date in order to not raise people's expectations, and specifically to ensure funding for the progress is secured early on in the development of a project.

The Deputy (Exchequer) agreed and suggested that whilst everyone was in favour of extending the Art Gallery and Museum, an enormous amount of money had already been wasted by the abandoned project.

The Deputy (Public Protection and Environment) was in favour of the establishment of a working group and suggested that care and repair of artefacts and the cost associated with this should be considered including the provision of air conditioning.

In summing up the Leader acknowledged the excellence of the Art Gallery and Museum which had been recognised nationally. He congratulated the staff and Friends of the museum for doing such an excellent job in conditions that were less than ideal. He supported the recommendations made in the report and looked forward to being advised on solutions by the working party. He, however, re-iterated that funding should be secured before, for example, planning consent was sought so as not to raise public expectations.

The Deputy (Health, Wellbeing and Economy) confirmed that the report back to Cabinet would be September 2003 and not October as indicated in the report.

### **Cabinet agreed that:-**

- i) the existing scheme to extend the Art Gallery and Museum at an estimated cost of £8 million should no longer proceed;**
- ii) a time-limited working party be established to investigate alternative means of securing improved Art Gallery and Museum facilities on the basis of the brief set out in paragraph 5.2 of the report and to report back to Cabinet in September 2003.**

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**Conclusions**

Although I do not believe that the existing proposal to commission and procure an extension to the Art Gallery and Museum is viable, I would like to see all other options revisited and reviewed, and I recommend the establishment of a working party to undertake investigations and to report back to the cabinet.

My suggested brief for the working party would be:

“to investigate fully all alternative means to secure additional exhibition space and improved facilities for the Art Gallery and Museum, including (but not exclusively):

- the establishment of a charitable trust
- the use of the adjoining council-owned library building
- the use of other council-owned buildings, for instance the new pavilion in the proposed Montpellier Gardens restoration project
- the potential for major private sponsorship
- any other form of public/private partnership
- the scope of Civic Pride resources

within a financial remit which does not require additional ongoing revenue funding of the service and which assumes the availability of no capital funding from the council”.

I recommend that the working party should be chaired by myself and that membership should include:

- two representatives of the Social and Community O&S committee
- a representative of the Friends of the Art Gallery and Museum
- Group Director Social and Community
- other officers as required

I am very conscious of the workload demands placed on members and officers at this time, particularly in the light of recent decisions relating to the Social and Community agenda, and I do not anticipate this additional demand being completed before September 2003.