

EPPING FOREST CENTRE JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 14 May 2014

Minutes of the meeting of the Epping Forest Centre Joint Consultative Committee held at the Guildhall EC2 at 11.00am

Present

Members:

Alderman Haines
Verderer Adams

Officers:

Jo Hurst	- Open Spaces Department
Natasha Dogra	- Town Clerk's Office
Alison Elam	- Chamberlain's Department
Steve Bunce	- Epping Forest Field Studies Centre
Mark Bolland	- Field Studies Council

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Deputy Ginsburg, Deputy McGuiness, Verderer Morris, Anthony Thomas, Geoff Brown and Paul Thomas.

2. DECLARATIONS BY MEMBERS OF ANY PERSONAL AND PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA

There were none.

3. MINUTES

Resolved: That the minutes be deferred to the next Committee meeting.

4. HEAD OF CENTRE'S REPORT ON ACTIVITY

The Committee considered the report of Steve Bunce, Head of the Epping Forest Field Centre. Members noted the following:

- Our operations were highly effective in 2013. We achieved really well against KPIs and important objectives, overcoming the challenges of 9% fewer contracted staff days in 2013 than 2012 and with 63 days lost to sick leave.
- 22,304 Learner experiences took place in 2013, and 99.20% expectations were met or exceeded.
- 100% of criteria met for the Northgate Arisnso Gold Shield Health & Safety Award. In addition the projected deficit was turned into a modest surplus as predicted in the October report.
- We delivered learning experiences to learners of all ability levels, aged from four to 'experienced', from a very diverse range of ethnic/social

groups. We used 46 well researched learning sites within and outside of Epping Forest, frequently taking learning nearer to the learners.

- 2,664 grant funded learner experiences were delivered in 2013 – (giving rise to a total of 8,620 which, after just three years, exceeds the target figure of 8,000 (10% of target for total learner experiences) in the four year business plan.
- The EU funded Lessons from Nature (LfN) project, developed and delivered with our European NGO partners, came to end in the autumn and the EU Assessor has subsequently affirmed that the Project delivery was of an appropriate standard. The project has enabled us to build on LfN learning pioneered at EFFC in 2008. The creation of the LfN website with its very significant learning resources has helped us to take a huge step towards the aspiration in the 2011-2014 EFFC Plan to make LfN a major part of the learning provision of the Centre. The challenge for 2014 and beyond would be to promote this resource and the related services to schools and to other audiences and we hope to secure funding to support this.
- The City Bridge Trust funded '**Learning for Biodiversity for Londoners**' project - delivered targeted provision to learners from 6 partner London schools - with additional informal Family drop in sessions and Adult courses – in school grounds, local parks and in Epping Forest. The project left a strong legacy of innovative programme and learning resources, enhanced capacity and improved networking and collaboration.
- Web-content improvements included better pre-course and post-course information, updated course descriptors and more photographs and information about our learning sites. Twitter was used to good effect with the LfN Project. Facebook photo galleries have continued to prove popular including 'Autumn Fungi', Death's Head Hawkmoth, Wildlife Spot of the Day and photographs from our grounds. Improvements were made to existing publicity material, newsletters and the use of social media.
- Following the approval of the budget it became clear that there was an opportunity to reduce staff costs further and this was taken to address the projected deficit with to reduce financial risks. Officers responded to staff turnover arising from the departures of one of our Team Leaders and one of our tutors early in 2013 by appointing replacements at the bottom of the teaching scale.
- The impacts of these changes, together with the consequence of reduced staffing levels already emplaced, meant that we were unable to commit time to the generation of 'additional' (non-core) income. This had been predicted in the 2013 Plan: *'the main impacts of the reduced staffing level willbe ... speed at which we can ... progress work of a developmental nature'*

- Officers were successful in strengthening the core work and this contributed to increased course income which, together with significantly reduced expenditure, produced a pleasing outturn.
- Achieving this financial performance and delivering KPIs alongside ambitious project work arose from huge (unsustainable) efforts by the staff team to try and address the many challenges that we faced in 2013. Officers thanked their staff for their constant hard work and support.

5. **HEAD OF CENTRE'S REPORT ON PROGRESS IN 2014**

The Committee considered the report of Steve Bunce, Head of the Epping Forest Field Centre. Members noted the following:

- One of our Team Leaders left in April after nearly ten years at the Centre to take a senior role at FSC Malham Tarn. As an interim step Officers had replaced her with a new member of our education team so that Officers could continue to deliver courses without disruption. The Bursar/Administrator left on 9 May.
- Further remedial works arising from the Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) undertaken in the summer of 2012 was due to take place in the near future (order 601319). The Contractor had indicated that they would shortly come on site to plan and schedule the work. This should address most outstanding FRA remedial actions. The possible exceptions to this relate to the testing of the lightning conductor and also to the advice to install emergency lighting in the adult toilets. The intentions regarding these were still unclear to me at the time of reporting.
- The boilers for the main building were taken out of commission on 17 January when they were declared unsafe by contractors. Whilst the support from the Superintendent and his team (temporary use of the Visitor Centre and a supply of portable electrical heaters) has been much appreciated the absence of appropriate heating has created a number of issues. Officers thanked the Superintendent of Epping Forest and his team for their constant support during this difficult time/
- These difficulties for Centre staff had also been compounded by the present arrangements for maintenance. Whilst some maintenance receives exemplary attention and the direct City staff contacts were always very helpful, Officers said it was sometimes difficult to understand why other maintenance issues are dealt with in a protracted way where there seems to be a considerable lack of clarity regarding process and intended outcome and where many people seem to be involved in resolving things that would appear to be resolvable in a less time consuming and complex manner. Officers raised this as a query

and not a complaint, and City Corporation Officers agreed to investigate this further.

6. **QUESTIONS**

There were none.

7. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT**

There was one item of urgent business.

8. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Resolved: That the date of the next meeting would be confirmed via email.

The meeting closed at 1:00pm

Chairman