

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

CABINET REPORT - AGENDA ITEM 19

WILLIAMSON PARK UPDATE

Introduction

In consideration of the above report, the Board of Williamson Park are keen that Cabinet have details of the decisions that were taken at their recent Board meeting and these are set out below.

At the Board meeting, full and lengthy consideration was given to the current operation and financial position of the company, and also to its status as a company controlled by the council.

The Board are keen to stress to Cabinet the real commitment of both board members and company employees to resolving the current difficult financial position and move the Park forward. The Board recognises that Cabinet are well aware of the very real importance of the Park locally, regionally, and nationally, and that over the years, it has developed and improved immensely under the control of the Board to the benefit of both local residents and as a visitor attraction.

Financial Position.

The current financial position of the company is set out in the report to Cabinet. For 2 years now the Park has struggled to meet its business plan objectives due to its worsening financial position and this has resulted in recent requests from the Board to the council for additional financial assistance. There have been a number of factors that have contributed to the current position however that have been outside the Board's control namely :-

- Poor weather resulting in reduced income
- High energy costs
- Extended absence of the Park's general manager through illness

With regard to the above, the Board wish to place on record its thanks and appreciation to the council for its continued financial support and to all the council employees who have introduced welcomed improvements to the management arrangements of the Park and undertaken a whole range of duties to ensure the operation of the Park has continued in the general manager's absence.

Notwithstanding the above, the current financial year will require a further grant allocation to the company to balance the 2008/9 accounts of approximately £50,000, and the cabinet report formally seeks Cabinet's approval of this sum.

Board Meeting Decisions

The Board are keen to resolve its financial position and at its recent meeting considered a range of options to improve matters. The Park's draft budget for 2009/10 currently shows a funding gap of £80,000. However, the Board believes that this deficit is manageable and has already set in motion a number of initiatives to help address the deficit.

In particular it has agreed :-

- Not to pursue its "Parks for People" heritage lottery bid. This will save on staff and consultancy costs and remove any matching funding commitments that might have been required.
- Requested savings and efficiency options for both the Butterfly house and Café/Shop.
- Requested options for a revised Management structure to bring about greater efficiencies
- Successful bid to the LSP for £17,000 to assist identify saving and efficiencies
- Agreed to pursue a bid for external funding through the Friends of the Park bid to the "Your Heritage" grant programme.
- Improved Marketing and Promotion as part of the wider review being undertaken within the City Council
- Improve financial management arrangements

As a result of this, the Board is optimistic that savings can be made and agreed not to request additional grant support from the council for 2009/10 over and above the provisional sum currently included in the draft budget. The Board are however keen to maintain the current level of officer support to the Park and wish this to be formally approved.

Status

In respect of the company's status, the Board is well aware that an option for the Cabinet to consider is to dissolve the company and bring the operation of Williamson Park back into the council.

The Board are strongly of the view that this would be counter productive and seriously jeopardise the Park's future. The Board are fully committed to driving through efficiencies and improvements, some of which have already been implemented, and would request that Cabinet defer any consideration of this for at least a further year to allow the Board time to effect the changes outlined above.

In a recent meeting with company employees, there was very strong support to retain the company status. Any move to dissolve the company and bring it back into the city council would be viewed by staff as demotivating and could involve additional costs.

Conclusion

The Board acknowledges that to continue without making savings and efficiencies is not an option. However, it believes that this can best be achieved by, retaining its company status, formalising the current level of officer support from the City Council, and pursuing the options for savings and efficiencies that it currently has in place. It also urges Cabinet to maintain its current level of revenue support to the company for 2009/10 and to review the position again after 12 months once the Board has had an opportunity to deliver its proposals.

Prepared on behalf of the Board of Directors of Williamson Park
Company

R. C. Muckle
Secretary to the Board.
15th January 2009