

# **COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE**

## **Civic Programme – Reception for Overseas Students 18<sup>th</sup> September 2008**

### **Report of Head of Democratic Services**

#### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To consider the future of the annual Reception for Overseas Students.

**This report is public.**

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (1) That an event be organised for Overseas Students to take place on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2008 in the Banqueting Suite of Lancaster Town Hall in the format suggested by Lancaster and Cumbria University in paragraph 4.1 of the report.**
- (2) That a further report on the success of the event be submitted to a future meeting of the Council Business Committee to determine whether the event should be re-instated in the Annual Civic Programme.**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 In January 2008 the Council Business Committee considered the future of the annual Mayoral reception for Overseas Students. At that time the decision was taken that the event be discontinued if attempts to communicate, publicise and promote the event with Lancaster University Students Union were not successful.
- 1.2 Since that meeting in January 2008, the Students Unions at both the Lancaster and Cumbria Universities were contacted to ascertain whether they had any objections to the discontinuation of the event. A response was received directly from the University of Cumbria Students Union who were keen to help promote the event should it continue, but outlining that the University of Cumbria does not have a large international student body.
- 1.3 No response was received directly from the Student Union body of the University of Lancaster. However, during discussions between the Economic Development and Tourism Service of the City Council and the International Students Office (ISO) of Lancaster University on a different matter, it was made clear that the ISO were extremely keen to continue the event and suggested that perhaps a joint tourism venture could be investigated as an alternative format for the event.
- 1.4 A meeting took place between representatives of the City Council and the two Universities in June 2008 and the Universities were asked to draw up a proposal for

an event which could be submitted to the Council for consideration. It was agreed at that meeting that a smaller event should be attempted for 2008 with a view to assessing the success of the new format, thereby determining whether the event could be developed further in future years.

## **2.0 Proposal Details**

2.1 On 5<sup>th</sup> August 2008, the City Council received a joint proposal from the Universities of Lancaster and Cumbria for a smaller event to take place in the Banqueting Suite of Lancaster Town Hall on Thursday 23 October 2008.

2.2 The proposal from the Universities is as follows:

- a) The event would begin with a welcome speech from the Mayor, directed to the students and the general audience who would be seated in theatre style seating in the Banqueting Suite.
- b) This would be followed by a presentation from a senior member of Tourism staff, highlighting some of the City's touristic opportunities using visual prompts (such as powerpoint).
- c) There would then be short presentations from two or three 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year international students from Lancaster and Cumbria Universities who have already taken advantage of local tourism and who can talk about their personal experiences.
- d) Prizes would be donated by Tourism and would be matched by Lancaster/Cumbria Universities for 3-5 students plus one friend to be able to visit local tourist attractions. Those events offered could be, for example, a ghost tour round Lancaster Castle, a canal tour, a visit to the Maritime Museum. The winning students could be presented with their prizes on the night by a representative from Tourism during the event. This would promote active student engagement with local tourism and allow students to see what kinds of events/attractions are available.
- e) Following on from above, students and other attendees can mingle and chat. If funds are available a performance by Morris dancers would be a lovely addition to the evening and an example of traditional English culture (*please note that there would not be enough space to accommodate this in the Banqueting Room which was the desired venue*).
- f) Some refreshments would be welcome although alcohol is not necessary, which might also help keep costs down.
- g) The Council can promote its activities at the event through relevant stands. Cycling awareness and tourism are suggested but the Council may also have additional suggestions to make.
- h) Lancaster and Cumbria Universities will also give further consideration to the publicity and marketing of the reception to their international students as well as to the design and functionality of the tickets traditionally provided by the Council in order to promote the event more thoroughly and provide more detail to students before the event and get a better indication of numbers. Lancaster University will also modify transport arrangements to collect students from the south end of campus in addition to the central pick-up point

since it would seem that walking through the campus in heavy rain in the last two years has contributed to putting students off attending the Reception at the last minute.

- 2.3 The Universities have indicated that they would welcome the opportunity to rejuvenate the Reception for Overseas Students and very much hope that an event can be designed which give the students a welcome to the City, whilst also promoting the Lancaster district and the work of the City Council.

### **3.0 Details of Consultation**

- 3.1 Both the Lancaster and Cumbria Universities have been consulted and their preferred event format is outlined in 2 above. The Head and staff of Economic Development and Tourism Services have also been involved in the discussions surrounding a rejuvenated event.

### **4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)**

- 4.1 Option 1 is to develop an event on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2008 in accordance with the proposals from Lancaster and Cumbria Universities, which is themed on a tourism nature but with information stands and staff from Services of the Council. Attempts have been made to consult with the universities via representatives on the Universities Cabinet Liaison Group, the International Students Offices and the Students Unions and for some time there appeared to be little appetite to continue this event. If Members wish to continue the event, it would seem sensible therefore to develop it on the lines now suggested by the Universities in order to build on their enthusiasm at this stage.
- 4.2 Option 2 is to develop an event on a format to be decided by the City Council which would be on the same suggested date, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2008 in the Town Hall. In contrast to the comments above, there would be a risk in developing an alternative event that there would be no support from the Universities and the event would fail as a result.
- 4.3 Option 3 is to discontinue the event and that no further effort is made to provide an event for students from the Universities of Lancaster and Cumbria.

### **5.0 Officer Comments and Preferred Option**

- 5.1 The Reception for Overseas Students has been declining for a number of years. The future of this event has been considered over the past year by the Council Business Committee and the onus was firmly placed on the Universities of Lancaster and Cumbria to decide what they feel would be a suitable format for an event for the students visiting Lancaster.
- 5.2 The proposals mentioned in 2 above are achievable only with the help of the Economic Development and Tourism Service of the City Council and the Universities of Cumbria and Lancaster. Having a revised format and being on a much smaller scale for 2008 there is the opportunity to assess the benefit of the event to overseas students with a view to making further changes for events in future years.
- 5.3 The Officer preferred option is therefore option 1 above but on a one year basis with the success or otherwise of the event being assessed afterwards before any continuing commitment is given.

**CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

**(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)**

None.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Costs for the annual Reception for Overseas Students have previously been met from the budget provided for Mayoral Functions and Hospitality. If this event continues this will remain the case.

Whilst the suggestions from the Universities include a reduction in the cost of refreshments provided, this is offset by the suggestion to offer a number of tourism related prizes and it is expected that costs will be in the region of £500.

Should it be decided that no event is to take place in this or in future years, the funding will be utilised to enhance other events in the Mayoral calendar as part of the civic programme reviewed by Council. Spending varies according to the requirements of individual Mayors to a maximum of £15,400 included in the budget for 2008/09. Any unspent budget at the end of each year falls into balances.

**SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The S151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct legal implications as a result of this report.

**MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Letter from Lancaster University dated 9<sup>th</sup> July, received on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2008

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