

# RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 12 JANUARY 2010  
title: CATERING AT CLITHEROE CASTLE MUSEUM  
submitted by: JOHN C HEAP, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES  
principal author: CHRIS HUGHES, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

## 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To let members know of progress with the future operation of the museum café.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities
  - **Council Ambitions** – to protect and enhance the environmental quality of the area
  - **Community Aims** - to be a well-managed Council providing efficient services for identified customer needs
  - **Community Objectives** – Education and Lifelong Learning Culture

## 2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As members will be aware, Gold & Brown went into liquidation on 1 October 2009, leaving the Council in a difficult position, both financially and operationally.
- 2.2 Having no time to assess the likely impact, the Council's Corporate Management Team concluded that, as the Café was an integral part of the visitor experience, it had to continue operating. After further debate, it became obvious that the only way to guarantee continuity was to bring the operation 'in house' until a long term arrangement could be resolved. It was, therefore, agreed that the Council would run the Café up until the end of March 2010 to allow us to understand its operation and decide its long-term future.
- 2.3 A great deal of effort had to be put into a short space of time to deal with legal matters, staffing, stock and ordering systems. Despite such issues, and with the support of existing Café staff, who had been let down by Gold & Brown, the Café was able to open again the day after Gold & Brown ceased trading.

## 3 CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 The Café has now been operational for three months and, whilst it has not been without its difficulties, it has provided a quality service. Although it has not been able to trade profitably so far, it must be recognised that we have moved into much quieter trading months and still trying to get staffing levels, profit margins and ordering systems right. We have, however, been able to attract interest for functions and events that is undoubtedly the way forward during the winter months when Café trade alone appears to be insufficient.
- 3.2 Monthly trading figures have been discussed at Budget Working Group and concluded that the Council should go back to the market to seek an outside partner to operate the Café.

3.3 This process has now been formalized and actioned with a view to appointing someone to take over from 1 April 2010.

3.4 The format is as follows:

- Advert placed in The Clitheroe Advertiser on 7 January 2010 and information placed on the website prior to Christmas.
- This will ask for expressions of interest by 20 January 2010.
- Interviews will take place on 29 January 2010, with a view to identifying a shortlist who will then be formally invited to tender.
- Deadline for tenders will be 26 February 2010.

3.5 A scoring matrix, based on cost, innovation and quality, is being devised to help us arrive at a balanced and transparent decision.

3.6 It is proposed that a member/officer panel be set up to conduct the initial interviews and review the final tender returns.

#### 4 **RISK ASSESSMENT**

The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- **Resources** – The current arrangement is not sustainable, although we should recognise that, if business conditions were spread over twelve months, the overall financial picture would be more favourable. The difficulty we have is that the business is only just over six months old, and so seasonal patterns have not been established. We also have insufficient information from the time Gold & Brown were operating the Café to establish how the facility performed during peak months.
- **Technical, Environmental and Legal** – Relevant tendering procedures will be followed to ensure the selection process has been both transparent and robust.
- **Political** – It is important that we find a long-term partner that is able to take the business forward on a profitable basis.
- **Reputation** – It is also important that the Café positively contributes to our aim of developing the whole site as one of the region's best visitor attractions.

#### 5 **RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

5.1 Notes the contents of the report and endorses the decision to seek an external partner for the future operation of the Atrium Café / venue.

5.2 Considers membership of the working group that will oversee the selection process.

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