
Cabinet Member (Policy and Leadership)

28th November 2013

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member (Policy and Leadership) - Councillor Ann Lucas

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Executive Director of Resources

Ward(s) affected: All

Title:

Petition – To Coventry City Council and Arena Coventry Limited

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

A valid petition with 18 signatures was handed to the Council on 22 October 2013 accompanied by a print out of an ePetition from 'change.org' with 531 signatures on. The petition requested both the City Council and Arena Coventry Limited to undertake some specific actions with a view to facilitating the return of Coventry City Football Club to play its home football matches at the Ricoh Arena in Coventry.

In accordance with the City Council's procedure for dealing with petitions this is to be considered by the Leader of the Council as the Cabinet Member for Policy and Leadership.

Recommendations:

(1) The Cabinet Member is recommended to:

Consider the petition and the report supporting the general aim of bringing club back to Coventry and ensure that the City Council does all it can to achieve the best outcome for the city, Coventry taxpayers and their asset.

List of Appendices included:

Appendix 1 – Petition

Other useful background papers:

None

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Petition – To Coventry City Council and Arena Coventry Limited

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 A valid petition with 18 signatures was handed to the Council on 22 October 2013 accompanied by a print out of an ePetition from 'change.org' with 531 signatures on. The petition requested both the City Council and Arena Coventry Limited to undertake some specific actions with a view to facilitating the return of Coventry City Football Club to play its home football matches at the Ricoh Arena in Coventry. The petition is attached to this report at Appendix 1.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 As the title of the petition implies, some of the points raised and questions asked are directed at Arena Coventry Limited (ACL) and its directors. ACL is an independent company limited by guarantee. Whilst the City Council is a shareholder in this company, it is not the sole shareholder, and it is not appropriate for the City Council to comment on the actions of the company or on any legal or commercial issues pertaining to it.
- 2.2 In addition, the City Council is currently subject to an application for Judicial Review regarding a loan arrangement it has with ACL. Despite the fact that the application has already been comprehensively rejected by a judge in the strongest terms, the claimants, a group of Sisu related companies, have chosen to appeal this decision as to whether there is a case to be heard and this limits the extent to which the City Council is able to comment publicly on some of these matters at the current time.
- 2.3 The City Council has consistently maintained that it wants to see Coventry City Football Club play at what it, and the vast majority of its fans, believes to be its true home, the Ricoh Arena in Coventry. The City Council has and will continue to support efforts to attempt to bring the football club back home.
- 2.4 The Leader of the City Council has publically stated that she is willing to talk to anyone who has realistic and evidence based plans for the long term future of the football club and the Ricoh Arena – and the ability to make it happen. She has also made it clear that all options are available for discussion and that the City Council will be prepared to discuss, subject to contract, and without prejudice to the on-going court case, the issue of stadium ownership with any serious interested parties.
- 2.5 In addition, as has been widely reported in the media, the Leader of the City Council has personally and proactively sought to open dialogue with the current owners of the football club with a view to building a relationship and creating the conditions in which the football club will be able to return.
- 2.6 As a result, the Leader of the Council met Joy Seppala, Chief Executive of SISU Capital Ltd, on 8 November 2013. The following media statement was issued after the meeting and once SISU had confirmed publically that the meeting had taken place:

“A Coventry City Council spokesman said: “We can confirm that Cllr Ann Lucas, Leader of the Council, met Joy Seppala today for private talks about the future of CCFC and the Ricoh Arena. No further talks are planned at this stage.”

“Both parties agreed that the details of these talks should remain private, so no further comment will be made by the Council at this time.”

- 2.7 In its role as a shareholder of ACL, the City Council is also aware that the company has sought, and continues to seek, negotiations with the owner of the football club in an attempt to reach a rental agreement which will see the football club return to the Ricoh Arena. While the detail of any such arrangement would need to be agreed between ACL and the football club, the City Council also supports these actions.
- 2.8 It must be noted, however, that a decision about where Coventry City Football Club plays its home matches can only be determined by the owners of the club in consultation with the Football League. In the same way, it must be recognised that the decision to take the football club from Coventry and to relocate in Northampton was taken solely by the owners of the football club again in consultation with the Football League.
- 2.9 The City Council recognises the importance of having a successful football league club playing in the city. However the Ricoh Arena complex hosts a range of other facilities, services and events and recognises that ACL may now be seeking to develop its business in other areas which are not related to the activities of Coventry City Football Club. This will include other events which will make use of the stadium bowl.
- 2.10 In the short term, it is understood that this should not impact on the football club being able to return to the arena, should they choose to do so and an agreement be reached, but clearly this cannot be guaranteed in the longer term should the football club owners continue to play 'home' matches away from Coventry.
- 2.11 The economic importance of Coventry City Football Club to the city's economy is recognised. Recent policy decisions of the City Council demonstrate that regeneration and economic growth are key priorities for this administration. Should the football club not choose to come back to the Ricoh Arena, the City Council recognises that the actions ACL plans to take to strengthen and grow the business will begin to mitigate some of the economic impact being felt by the football club relocating to Northampton.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1 None

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 None

5. Comments from the Executive Director, Resources

- 5.1 Financial Implications

- 5.1.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

- 5.2 Legal implications

- 5.2.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

6. Other implications

- 6.1 **How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?**

6.1.1 The report's recommendation that the Council supports the general aim of bringing Coventry City Football Club back to the city and will do all it can to achieve the best outcome for the city and taxpayers is in line with the Council's corporate objectives.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

6.2.1 There are no risks with the proposal as there is no action that the Council can legally take to support the request outlined in the petition.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

6.3.1 No direct impact.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

6.4.1 There are no equality issues arising from this report as the recommendations are not a change in policy or service.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

6.5.1 No direct impact.

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

6.6.1 No direct impact.

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Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

Contributor/approver name	Title	Directorate or organisation	Date doc sent out	Date response received or approved
Contributors:				
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Michelle Rose	Governance Services Officer	Resources	14/11/13	15/11/13
Jenni Venn	Corporate Policy	Chief Executives	14/11/13	15/11/13
Clarissa Evans	Commercial team manager	Resources	14/11/13	15/11/13
Names of approvers for submission: (officers and members)				
Finance: Barry Hastie	Assistant Director Finance	Resources	14/11/13	18/11/13
Legal: Name Clarissa Evans	Commercial team manager	Resources	14/11/13	15/11/13
Director: Chris West	Executive Director of Resources	Resources	14/11/13	18/11/13
Members: Cllr Ann Lucas	Leader of the Council		15/11/13	16/11/13

This report is published on the council's website:

www.coventry.gov.uk/meetings

Appendix 1 – Petition

To Coventry City Council & Arena Coventry Limited:

A large number of Coventry fans & city taxpayers just want Coventry City FC back at the Ricoh Arena as soon as possible – regardless of who owns either.

We believe Ricoh Arena freehold owners Coventry City Council - as well as the club's owners Sisu/ Otium, the Football League and others - must share responsibility for the city losing our proud football club.

We now call on councillors to take control of the situation for the good of the city's economy, pride and reputation.

We say campaigning by fans' groups so far has taken place outside Sisu HQ and 'home' games at Northampton, but not the Council House - despite the popular view that all sides must take responsibility.

We call on the council and its part-owned Ricoh management company Arena Coventry Limited to accept its costly legal attempts to oust Sisu failed - and Sisu/Otium on August 2 won the crucial Football League's "golden share".

We call on the council to conduct a survey of the impact on the city's economy of losing its football club (a) temporarily over up to 5 years, and (b) permanently, if & when a new stadium is built in Warwickshire following the Northampton ground share.

We ask councillors, "What is the point of having an empty taxpayer-supported Ricoh Arena as a white elephant, without the club it was built for?"

We call on the council to explain to fans and city taxpayers what strategy it now has, if any, for returning the Sky Blues to the Ricoh Arena as soon as possible.

We call on councillors to explain the council's business plan for the Ricoh Arena without the football club.

We are concerned that a so-called "public asset" without the football club it was built for could soon become a "public liability". It has already this year been propped up with £14million of taxpayer support.

We call on the council and ACL to explain where the money is coming from for legal and PR fees in its dispute with the club's owners. Is this further risk to the taxpayer?

This independent campaign is not "pro-Sisu", but recognises all parties must urgently resume talks over stadium revenues and ownership - not simply a return to having the club as tenants.

Many fans believe whoever owns the club should own the stadium to help maximise crucial club revenues - and that selling the Ricoh Arena to the current owners could represent the best possibility of a Sisu exit strategy.

We therefore say the council should not exclude from negotiations selling the stadium - on a freehold or leasehold arrangement - to the club's legal and rightful owners, whoever they may be.

We call on the council/ACL directors Martin Reeves and Chris West to explain why they have had ownership talks with other potential investors in the club, but not for months with the current owners.

We will hold an initial peaceful demonstration outside Coventry City Council House on Tuesday, October 22, from 1-2pm, before a full council meeting at 2pm.