

Committee: Community

Agenda Item

Date: 13 March 2008

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Title: MUSEUM SERVICE CHARGES FOR
EDUCATION SERVICES AND ENTRY FEES

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Item for decision

Summary

- 1 A decision by members is required on the level of charges for educational services and entry fees at Saffron Walden Museum, to take effect from 1 April 2008. In addition to purely financial considerations, implications for access, visitor/user numbers and the general 'market' for museum charges in Essex need to be considered.

Recommendations

- 2 Increase education charges for schools booking taught sessions and adult groups requesting talks on or off site, from current rate of £2-00 per pupil to £2-50. The minimum group rate to rise from £35 to £40, but with discretion to waive the minimum charge for small special needs groups and charge them at 'per pupil' rate.
- 3 Community Committee agrees to retain admission charges at the current level for 2008-09, to maximise access to and use of the Museum, but subject to longer-term review in the context of the Museum Service's Forward Plan (Stage II).
- 4 Community Committee recommends to Finance & Administration that the admission charges be retained at current level.

Background Papers

- 5 Audience Development Study 2005, ABL (for Saffron Walden Museum, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund)

Impact

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Communication/Consultation	Audience Development Study (ABL 2005)
Community Safety	No issues identified
Equalities	No specific issues, but service should be accessible to as wide an audience as possible, including those on low incomes
Finance	
Human Rights	No issues identified

Legal implications	None; Museum charges are discretionary
Sustainability	Increasing charges will increase income only if visitor/user numbers remain constant
Ward-specific impacts	Users of the service from all wards
Workforce/Workplace	No issues identified

Situation

Charges for Education Services

- 7 School visits (*Code X10/K704*) brought in income of £8,318 in 2006-07. Approximately 95% of this derives from schools booking taught sessions with the Education Officer, and the remaining 5% or so from adult groups (local societies and W.I.s) requesting talks from Museum staff either in the Museum or at other venues.
- 8 The current charge is £2 a head, minimum group charge £35. However, discretion is used with very small special needs groups, which are generally charged 'per head' because levying the minimum group charge would result in them being charged an unreasonable amount *pro rata*.
- 9 Some museums do not charge for school sessions, such as Chelmsford or the Fitzwilliam in Cambridge. Those that do charge more than Saffron Walden Museum have better facilities or a specific and special product to offer, such as Colchester Castle or Braintree Museum's Victorian Schoolroom. Audley End House is also looking to increase its services to schools, using the former servants' wing for sessions on Victorian domestic activities. For some subjects, therefore, there will be competition both in price and in facilities / activities offered.
- 10 The overall cost to schools of making visits has risen significantly in recent years due to transport and insurance costs increasing, with some schools paying as much as £1,000 for coach hire. While the Museum's charge may therefore be only a (small) part of the overall cost to the school, a large increase might encourage some schools to investigate other non-charging museums, or put the cost of a school visit beyond what some parents will pay. Against this, the Museum has an attractive and 'child-friendly' site, its education service has a high reputation and the breadth of the collections enables a wider-than-average range of subjects to be offered, all of which may help to attract and retain customers. Many of the adult groups requesting talks are from small village societies with limited expenditure, and responding to these requests is part of outreach into the local community, so large increases might be prohibitive for smaller groups.
- 11 All these considered, the market could bear a small increase in charges, which have not been increased for five years. The suggest new rate of £2.50 per pupil, minimum group charge £40 (but discretion to charge Special Needs groups at per head rate only as they visit in very small groups.)

- 12 The income generated from 4,000 school pupils (approximate no. of pupils in sessions taught by Education Officer 2007-08) would be £8,000 under present charges but @ £2-50 per head, income could rise to about £10,000. However, due to the retirement of the Education Officer in May 2008 and the inevitable hiatus before a successor can be in post, school visits and income will not meet this target for 2008-09, so the full benefit will not be felt until 2009-10.

Entry Fees

- 13 Entry Fees (*Code V10/K706*) raised income of £5,647 in 2006-07. Current charges are: £1 adults, discounts 50p, children (18 and under) free. There is an annual season ticket available at £3, discount £1-50. Annual visitor figures for 2006-07 were 22,484, but if schools are deducted from this figure, the number of public visitors was 15,911. Visitor figures (excluding schools) for the last five years have ranged between 14,073 and 15,911, with an average of 14,672, but of these at least 5,000 will be non-paying (children under 18). Income from tickets sold is derived approximately as follows: Adults (£1) 65% / Discounts (50p) 25% / Season tickets (10%).
- 14 Changing the entry fee would result in expenditure of approximately £1,500 to change printed publicity and signs, which must be offset against additional income raised.
- 15 Entry to the Museum was free before 1989 when the entry charge was introduced. Visitor figures fell by 40% and have never returned to the pre-charge levels (around 25,000 per annum including schools). The entry fee has not been raised since its introduction, and could be raised, but there are other factors to consider.
- 16 The Audience Development Study undertaken by ABL for the Museum Service in 2005 found a mixed reaction among visitors and non-visitors to Museum entry charges. Broadly, a small increase might well be tolerated by most existing users, but could deter potential new visitors and repeat visits; the greater the increase in entry fees, the greater the deterrent factor. An increase in entry fee would be likely to cause some drop in visits, with consequent effect on income (souvenir sales and donations box as well as tickets) and performance indicators. Public expectations of free entry to public museums are often confused because government policy in recent years has promoted free entry to national museums, which receive support direct from central government.
- 17 Predictions are difficult to make with any accuracy, but as a very rough guide, a doubling of entry fees to £2 adult, £1 discounts would not automatically double income: an increase of 50% income from tickets might be more realistic, given a likely fall in visitor numbers. Season tickets do not account for a significant amount of the total (most are used by Museum Society members who receive one as part of their 'membership package'). Based on 2006-07 figures, income from doubling admission prices might therefore be around £8,400 (an increase of 50% or £2,800 on 2006-07 income from admissions).
- 18 The majority of local museums in Essex and the surrounding area do not charge (Harlow, Epping, Chelmsford, Southend; Hertford, Royston, Hitchin and Letchworth). Bishop's Stortford and Braintree Museums charge £2, although Braintree has considered going free and Bishop's Stortford has

recently re-opened after a major refurbishment with new galleries. Colchester Castle charges £5.10 for adults, but the facility is in a different league, and other branches of Colchester Museum Service are free.

- 19 Raising entry fees would not be good publicity at a time when the Museum is fund-raising for the Heritage Quest Centre project, a project intended to increase access to collections, and may send a contradictory message to the Heritage Lottery Fund and other organisations approached for significant grants or donations.
- 20 If necessary, the equivalent amount of money (approx £140 based on 2.5% of last year's total) will be removed from another budget code to compensate, although increases to profit margins of souvenirs should raise at least this amount.
- 21 In the longer-term context of the Museum's Forward Plan, entry fees may be considered in conjunction with future improvements to the Museum and Castle site (Stage II of Forward Plan). This is dependent on the Heritage Quest Centre being provided first, to prepare the way for a re-organisation of the Museum building, so it is several years ahead.

Risk Analysis

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Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Fail to meet income targets because of hidden costs and users are deterred by higher charges	Medium	Medium	Recommendations should enable a small amount of additional income to be generated without a significant decrease in visitors or users.
Apparent conflict with plans to increase accessibility of collections may confuse public and funding organisations	Medium	Medium	Recommendations should be sustainable by schools and other education groups, but not conflict with general accessibility of Museum and collections. Inform Heritage Lottery Fund and other potential funding organisations of reasons for any change.