

Committee:	Finance & Administration	Agenda Item
Date:	7 February 2008	5
Title:	Special Arrangements for Retirement and Recruitment of Museum Education Officer	
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Summary

Members are asked to decide on the appropriate course of action for recruitment of a new Museum Education Officer, following the retirement of the current post holder in May 2008, as this post is critical in generating visitors, income and a public profile for the Museum Service. An uninterrupted and immediate transition to the new post holder is required if services to schools, visitor numbers, income and performance indicators are to be maintained. Alternatively, and especially in current circumstances, a decision on recruitment could be deferred to March; this option would allow the Museum Society to investigate possible means of financial assistance, but would set recruitment back with the consequent break in provision of the service and loss of school visits and income.

Recommendations

Members are asked to decide the appropriate course of action:

1. Recruitment for a new Education Officer is permitted to commence in February with the aim of appointing a new post holder to start on 19 May 2008 and ensure uninterrupted provision of service.
2. A decision on recruitment is deferred to the March committee cycle, pending confirmation by Saffron Walden Museum Society of possible financial assistance. The resulting delay in recruitment would lose school visits and income.

Background Papers

None

Impact

Communication/Consultation	Schools booking enquiries for after April 2008 are currently being taken on a provisional basis, but need confirmation
Community Safety	None

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Equalities	No issues identified
Finance	Small additional salary cost of £860 approximately (including on-costs) associated with Option 1
Human Rights	No issues identified
Legal implications	No issues identified
Sustainability	Necessary to sustain high-profile service to schools and maintain customer base in long-term
Ward-specific impacts	Potentially all wards
Workforce/Workplace	Minimal impact if new Education Officer is recruited in May

Situation

- 1 The Museum Education Office will be retiring in May 2008 and an immediate replacement is needed to ensure continuity of services to schools and of the holiday activity programme and hence continuity of visitor figures and income. The Museum's education services require a dedicated specialist and a typical pre-booked school session, including preparation and clearing up, take up most of the working day, with additional time needed to administer school bookings and plan with teachers for future visits, as each session is tailored to the school's and pupils' particular requirements. The Education Officer is also chiefly responsible for the Museum's holiday family activity programme, in collaboration with other Museum staff. It would be impossible for other staff to take over delivery of school sessions, as all have their own specialist roles of equal importance to the operation of the service. The absence of an Education Officer would also reduce capacity for providing a varied holiday activity programme to current levels.
- 2 At least 5,000 school pupils per year benefit from taught sessions with handling collections of objects and specimens in the Museum. The breadth of collections in the Museum allows a wide range of subjects to be offered in support of the National Curriculum, such as 'Ancient Egypt' or 'Signs of Spring', and 'bespoke' sessions are sometimes devised to meet special requests from schools, for example 'Mazes and Problem-solving'. It has taken the present Education Officer some years and much research to build up the range of topics currently on offer, and use of Bridge End Garden has been built into appropriate topics whenever opportunity permits. School visits are a major contributor to visitor / user figures for the Museum Service and a major contributor to income, from fees raised (currently £2 per child) and sale of

souvenirs, for which school parties are the largest customers. It is estimated that schools are responsible for at least 60% of sales (= approximately £6,000 in 2006-07 due to schools). Audience research has also shown that a number of family visits are generated by children bringing their parents or grandparents to the Museum because they enjoyed their school visit so much.

- 3 Normal recruitment procedures would entail a gap of some months between the retirement of the Education Officer at the end of May and the earliest likely date for a successor to be in post (November 2008). Without the benefit of an overlap between post-holders and rapid induction, it would take the new Education Officer around two months to become sufficiently familiar with collections and the most popular subjects requested to deliver at least a basic range of school sessions and activities. In practice this would mean suspending taught sessions for schools for the second half of the summer term and all of the autumn term 2008. It would still be possible to take 'independent' school visits (gallery visits from schools who do not want a taught session) but these account for only a small fraction of total school visits and do not generate income from fees.
- 4 Schools book increasingly far in advance – the Museum is already taking bookings for May 2008 and at present cannot take bookings beyond this date. An early decision on recruitment of the next Education Officer is needed so that schools can be advised as soon as possible. A suspension in services would risk losing some schools as long-term customers if they have to find alternative venues, especially now that some museums do not charge for taught school sessions (For example, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Chelmsford Museum, and it is understood that Audley End may be introducing free school sessions on the Victorians and other topics during 2008.)
- 5 Income generated from schools varies according to numbers in each class or year, and the amount of pocket money children are allowed to spend on trips, but as a rough guide, based on 2006-07 figures, one typical week's school bookings generates an average of £250 in booking fees and £180 from sale of souvenirs, total £430. (Weeks towards the end of the summer term can be below average due to distractions such as sports days and the increasing number of other organisations offering activities at this time of year.) On average, each half term period contributes around 900 pupil-visits to the Museum's performance indicators, or around 1,000 visits when teachers and adults are included.
- 6 To ensure continuity of services to schools, Option 1 would bring forward the recruitment of a new Education Officer according to the following timetable. This gives a two-week overlap between post-holders, which is the minimum amount of time necessary for a fast-track induction by the outgoing post holder and hand-over to ensure continuity of a basic service.

February 2008	advertise (usual professional/national and local channels)
Early April	interview and offer appointment
19 May	target date for new Education Office to start in post

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19-23 May one week 'crash course' for new Education Officer working alongside outgoing post-holder, to provide comprehensive induction into teaching facilities, handling collections and schools loans boxes, teaching potential for all Museum collections, types of sessions booked for rest of term.

26-30 May half-term week for new post-holder to research and prepare their teaching sessions for June - July (and prepare for holiday activities beyond that).

30 May retirement of out-going Education Officer

The Education Officer has kindly offered to continue to advise her successor after 30 May if needed. As far as possible, bookings for the latter half of term will be focussed on a limited range of popular topics so that the new Education Officer will not be overstretched with too many different sessions to prepare at once. It will take the new post-holder at least a year to build up to a similar range of subjects as developed by the current Education Officer.

7 Cost of Option 1 would be two weeks' extra salary at an extra cost of around £860 (including on-costs) compared to having one post-holder continuously in post, but with continuity of service, visitor numbers and income guaranteed. Recruitment costs are additional to this but would have to be met at whatever date the post was advertised.

8 Option 2 defers a final decision to March, by which time the Museum Society should be able to confirm whether or not it can provide some exceptional financial assistance towards the Museum Service budget. Under this option, recruitment would begin in April at earliest, a new post holder would not be in place before August / September and without an induction they would need longer to build up schools sessions. The net effect would be loss of 800 – 1,000 visits and around £2,000 income from the second half of the summer term, and in the first half of the autumn term maybe 500 fewer visits, and £1,000 drop in income, while the new post holder finds their feet and bookings pick up again. The summer holiday activity programme would also be affected; this is more difficult to calculate but losses might be in the order of 500 visits and £200 income if sessions are reduced to a level manageable for other staff, given their own work programmes and project commitments.

9 The Museum Society has indicated that it is willing and financially able to offer exceptional assistance, in order to allow the Council to maintain the Education Officer post during 2008-09. However, as a charity it cannot fund a local authority post. Discussions are in hand to identify other ways in which the Society could legitimately fund other Museum expenditure during 2008-09. The situation should be confirmed by the beginning of March.

10 **Comparison of options:**

Figures in the table below are an approximate guide, and make no allowance at this stage for possible income from the Museum Society which may offset other areas of the Museum Service budget. Essentially, Option1 favours retaining public service levels and Museum Service targets; Option 2 favours the overall financial situation, the difference being around £3,000.

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	Effect on Visits	Effect on Income	Saving on salary Education Officer	Net Position
Option 1 Recruitment starts February, for seamless transition in May	No loss	No loss	- £ 860 (additional expenditure for 2-week induction)	- £ 860
Option 2 Delay decision till March – assume recruitment starts in April	Loss of 2,000	- £ 3,200 (see paragraph 8 above)	About + £5,590 (13 weeks @ £430)	+ £2,390

- 11 It should also be noted that the Heritage Lottery Fund would need to be advised of any prolonged period without an Education Officer and its likely effect on both the proposed Heritage Quest Centre project, and the ongoing project at Bridge End Garden, where the Education Officer provides an educational element in BEG's Lottery-funded programme.

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Loss of school visits, and associated income, after May 2008	High	High	Begin recruitment process ahead of Education Officer's retirement, to ensure continuity of service and enable advance bookings to be taken
Longer term loss of school customers to other providers if there is a long interruption to services	High	High	Recruit new Education Officer as soon as permissible, so that customers do not find alternatives and stay away (especially in face of competition from other museums and venues)