

<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Finance &amp; Administration</b>	<b>Agenda Item</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>27<sup>th</sup> March 2008</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Special Arrangements for Retirement and Recruitment of Museum Education Officer</b>	
<b>Author:</b>	<b>Carolyn Wingfield, Curator, 01799 510333</b>	Item for decision

---

## Summary

Members are asked to determine 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. A speedy transition to the new post holder is required so that services and income can be resumed from the autumn term onwards. To assist the current financial situation, Saffron Walden Museum Society has offered to offset the costs of maintaining the Museum buildings in 2008/09 only with an exceptional contribution up to a maximum of £24,000, to enable the Council to make a similar sum available to recruit and employ a new Education Officer, as set out in the Society's letter of 3 March 2008 (copy attached to this report).

## Recommendation

Recruitment of a new Education Officer is allowed to commence in April 2008 with the intention of appointing a new post-holder to start in August or September 2008 on a permanent contract, and the Museum Society's offer as set out in their letter of 3 March 2008 is accepted.

## Background Papers

Letter from Saffron Walden Museum society to Chairman of Finance & Administration Committee, 3 March 2008 copy attached to this report)

## Impact

Communication/Consultation	The Museum is unable to take school bookings for taught sessions for June 2008 onwards until a new Education Officer is in post.
Community Safety	None
Equalities	No issues identified

Finance	Museum Society contribution to repairs and maintenance will offset Education Officer salary, on-costs and recruitment costs (estimated at £24,000). Income from schools and visitor numbers will drop after May 2008 until new post-holder is in post and has re-established the service.
Human Rights	No issues identified
Legal implications	The Museum Society, as a charity, cannot fund Council staff posts. It can fund work on the Museum buildings which it owns.
Sustainability	Necessary to sustain high-profile service and maintain customer base in long-term
Ward-specific impacts	Potentially all wards
Workforce/Workplace	Impact contained if new Education Officer is recruited in summer 2008, but will stretch other staff to provide summer activities programme to usual level

### 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 Around 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 in 2007-08) 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 (about £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). It would take the new Education Officer around two months to become sufficiently familiar with collections and the most popular subjects requested to deliver just 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. If recruitment were brought forward and allowed to begin in April, a new Education Officer could take up the post in August or September, and be able to commence teaching from October 2008, so that a service could be provided and some income generated during the autumn term.
- 4 Schools book increasingly far in advance – the Museum has already taken bookings up to the end of 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, as does the amount of money children are allowed to spend on trips, but as a 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 summer activities.) On average, each half term period contributes up to 900 pupil-visits to the Museum's performance indicators, or around 1,000 visits including teachers and adults.
- 6 The cost of employing an Education Officer (salary + on-costs) is approximately £430 per week; for one year, salary and on-costs plus recruitment costs would total about £24,000.

Special Arrangements for Retirement and Recruitment of Education Officer  
 Finance & Administration, Agenda Item 6

- 7 In view of the Council's current financial situation, Saffron Walden Museum Society has offered to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Council, as set out in their letter of 3 March 2008 (attached), to enable a new Education Officer to be employed as soon as possible. As a charity, the Society is prohibited from providing funds for the employment of local authority staff, however the Society has offered funds up to a maximum of £24,000 for maintenance of Museum buildings, which it owns, to be paid on a pro-rata basis equivalent to the salary, on-costs and recruitment costs expended in the appointment of the Education Officer during the 2008/09 financial year only. The Society's offer is made on the expectation that the Council will continue to fund the Education Officer post after 2008/09 and that it will be a permanent contract, as a short-term contract could deter suitable candidates and would not give the post-holder sufficient time to build up a thorough knowledge of the collections and a full range of sessions to offer.
- 8 It should be noted that under the Management and Lease Agreements between the Council and Museum Society, the Council is normally responsible for maintenance of museum buildings and would be expected to resume full financial responsibility for this after 2008/09.
- 9 The Museum Service's current application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the Heritage Quest Centre project has been made on the expectation that the permanent staff of the Museum Service will be maintained and not reduced; moreover the Education Officer will be needed to work alongside and advise other staff and the project's Outreach Officer if HLF funding is secured. The HLF-funded project at Bridge End Garden also relies on the Education Officer to help develop the educational potential of the Garden. Continuation of the Education Officer as a permanent post would therefore be necessary for both these projects to run as planned, and any significant change would need to be discussed with the HLF and other funding organisations.
- 10 It is intended to rename the post 'Learning Officer' to indicate that the service provides formal and informal learning opportunities for all ages and interests, and not only to schools.

**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 some 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)