

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE MUSEUM MANAGEMENT JOINT WORKING PARTY held at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 17 NOVEMBER 1998

Present:- Councillors Mrs J E Menell, D M Miller and G W Powers - Uttlesford Members; Ms S Kirkpatrick, N B Newman, E Planterose and A Watson - Museum Society representatives.

Officers in attendance:- Mrs C Allison, Mrs S McLagan and M T Purkiss.

I. APOLOGY

An apology for absence was received from Councillor J Hurwitz.

I. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE MEETING

It was agreed that Councillor Mrs J E Menell be appointed Chairman for the meeting.

I. REPORT ON THE CONSEQUENCES OF CAPPING THE UTTLESFORD MUSEUM SERVICE/SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM BUDGET

The Working Party recalled that at the Amenities Sub-Committee meeting on 29 January 1998 a decision had been taken that the total Museum Budget should be capped at its 1998/99 level of £230,000 for three years to March 2001.

It was noted that a multi-disciplinary team of officers had prepared a report which considered the predicted effects on the Uttlesford Museum Service and Saffron Walden Museum of their budget being capped for three years. The report emphasised that the Museum was a service of the Council and, as such, was subject to the same opportunities and constraints as the Council's other services. The report considered that the Museum would not be able to function at the level agreed by the Council if full capping remained in place for the three years. The report examined the implications of capping. The major area of expenditure was on essential building works, which included statutory obligations, health and safety requirements and lease requirements. This area swallowed up a large amount of the budget and it was noted that in the first year it would amount to 11% of the budget, 16½% in the second year and 15% in the third year. It also needed to be borne in mind that delaying essential repairs would lead to a deterioration of the building.

The second area considered was internal charges. This budget included the Council's internal costs of providing essential support services which were necessary in order to provide the required Museum services. These included IT, payroll and cleaning and there was very little room to influence the rate charged without affecting other business centres.

The third area examined was staffing. If capping was continued there would be options of either a fully staffed Museum with no service budget or a Museum with a service budget but insufficient staff to provide the services. This could lead to redundancies, low morale and loss of service.

The Working Party then looked at the fourth area of providing a reduced service with the aim of using savings to offset other costs and assessed the impact on service provision.

The fifth area assessed was the reduction in income. A reduced service would mean a reduction in marketing, reduced numbers of visitors and a reduction in shop sales. There would also be consequential effects on the level of grants and sponsorship which might be forthcoming.

The final area examined was Council policy and Museums and Galleries Commission (MGC) Registration. The Council had agreed the Museum policy in April 1996 and the Service levels through the Service Review and Forward Plan agreed in 1997. The Working Party noted that any decrease in standards would put the Museum's Registration with the MGC under threat. The criteria for Best Value from the Department of Media, Culture and Sport set Full Registration as the standard which Museums would be expected to meet. Loss of registered status would deny the Museum access to a range of funding opportunities which would significantly increase the net costs of service.

In discussing the report, the Working Party referred to the Council's adopted Museum policy and stressed that expenditure on the Museum was providing a Council service and was not a subsidy. It was considered that it was important to induct new Members into understanding the value of the Uttlesford Museum service. The Working Party

noted that comparisons had been made with other local Museums and these demonstrated that the Uttlesford service was extremely cost effective.

The Working Party particularly noted that the service related elements over which the Curator had control, were only 11% of the total budget. The Working Party considered that it was important that the Council should be moving forward in articulating the improvements outlined in the Service Review and Forward Plan and in working towards achieving Best Value.

The Working Party then considered the way forward and reiterated that the report had clearly demonstrated that there was very little flexibility in the Museum's budget to accommodate the inevitable increases in costs that the Museum would incur over the next three years. There was no opportunity to reallocate resources from one section of the budget to meet the rising costs in another section as the effect would be detrimental to the service as a whole. Also, there was no scope to increase income to any great extent without there being an increase in expenditure in terms of staff, promotions and marketing resources.

With full capping, it would be necessary to change the Museum policy and the agreed levels of service. Registered status with the MGC would then not be sustainable. The Working Party considered the following four main options:-

- (a) Capping at £230,000 remains in force with a consequential loss of Registered Museum Status, jobs and service to the public.
- (b) The 'other costs' budget be capped at the 1998/99 revised budget level.
- (c) The 'other costs' budget (1998/99 revised) be treated in the normal way (ie, allowing for inflation) but making NO allowance for growth in the next two financial years.
- (d) The Museum's budget be not capped.

The Working Party considered that options (a) and (b) would be extremely damaging to the service and discounted these.

Following a full discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of options (c) and (d) the Working Party unanimously agreed to

RECOMMEND that the Council be asked to adopt option (d) which would ensure that the Museum's budget is not capped and enable it to achieve the objectives of the approved Service Review and Forward Plan.

I. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that, following the special meeting of the Community Services Committee to be held on 23 November 1998, the Head of Leisure and Amenities would determine whether it was necessary to hold a meeting of the Working Party on 1 December 1998. If this was not required a meeting be held in January 1999.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm.

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