

**MUSEUM MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP held at the Museum Great Hall
on WEDNESDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2023 at 6.00 pm**

Present: Councillor M Sutton (Chair)
Councillors J Davey and A Reeve

Museum Society: K Eden, D Kent, R Priestley and T Watson

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Director of Corporate Services), C Edwards (Democratic Services Officer), J Oxley (Collections Officer), A Webb (Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services) and C Wingfield (Curator - Saffron Walden Museum)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Moran and Sell and from Christine Sharpe from the Museum Society.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 12th April 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

3 MUSEUM SOCIETY CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair of the Museum Society said that there would be a pause on the decision to spend £37k on the metric survey for the Museum.

He said that they still awaited confirmation of the changes to the service following the imminent retirement of the Curator, Carolyn Wingfield.

The Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services said that the financial forecast for the Council was challenging and the overall budget would need to be reduced by a third by the end of a five year period. He raised the following: -

- Blueprint Uttlesford was the name for the Council's change programme.
- The reduction in budget would have an impact on service delivery and ultimately on head count.
- Each service would be looked at over the five year period and the Museum would be in the first tranche this year.
- A temporary structure would be put in place and an interim Curator appointed internally until March 2025, the Museum would be reviewed and options for the service considered in this time.
- A number of options would be presented to Cabinet for consideration.
- A new tenant would be found as quickly as possible for the part of the Museum which had been rented by the Fry Art Gallery.

- The charging policy would be looked at as part of the review, entry fees were currently at a low basic level.

4 **MUSEUM CURATOR'S REPORT**

The Curator presented the quarterly report for April to June 2023 and she highlighted the following: -

- The user statistics included visitors and those who engaged via post, e-mail and telephone, visitors to the website were not included.
- The Museum had a separate website to the Council, it was in the process of being updated and was due to go live shortly.
- Visitor numbers peaked around the school holidays.
- Visitor numbers had not yet returned to pre-Covid levels but were gradually improving.
- Volunteers had left during Covid and it was difficult to recruit, train and retain volunteers especially at weekends and Bank Holidays. There was one paid employee who worked on a Saturday.
- Loan boxes remained popular and Museum staff visited schools, school visits to the Museum were predominantly local schools now, although there was a recent visit from a school in Tower Hamlets.

5 **MUSEUM ACCREDITATION**

The Curator said that a number of the policy documents for the Museum Accreditation had been through the Cabinet process in 2019. As part of the process the Museum would need a new interim forward plan which would include budgets for the current year and an outline budget for 2024/25. This would need to go through Cabinet again and as the deadline date for completion was 18th January it would need to go to Cabinet in December.

The Director of Corporate Services said that the accreditation by the Arts Council allowed the Museum to bid for funds from a number of sources which included the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

6 **ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT**

Feedback from schools was positive and was usually given in an informal way as it was difficult to get forms filled in. Schools that did engage with the Museum tended to come back again on a regular basis.

The Director of Corporate Services said that the Museum was second on a list of nineteen things to do in Saffron Walden on Trip Advisor.

Tony Watson said that 1st April 2025 was the 50 year anniversary of the agreement between the Museum Society and Uttlesford District Council and should be acknowledged in some way.

The meeting thanked Carolyn and wished her all the best in her retirement.

7

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING.

To be arranged in November and to be held in the Museum Great Hall after the new exhibition opens on 11th November.

The meeting ended at 6.37pm