

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	Cabinet	Date:	19 July 2017
Subject:	The City Museums Service		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure		
Wards Affected:	All		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	None		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present the findings of a review into the viability and operation of the City's Museums Service and set out the actions taken to date to respond to the issues raised in the review report.
- 1.2 To seek agreement in principle, and subject to contract, for the transfer of the Gloucester Life Museum site.
- 1.3 To seek endorsement of proposals to develop a bid for HLF Resilience Funding to take forward other significant elements of the review report's recommendations.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Cabinet is asked to **RESOLVE** that

- (1) The Review into the City's Museums Service is received and welcomed and that Jill Shonk is thanked for her work in undertaking the review
- (2) Agreement in principle is given to the transfer of the Gloucester Life Museum site and subject to contract. Delegated authority is given to the Corporate Director, after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, the Head of Policy and Resources and the Council Solicitor to agree the terms and details of the transfer and complete the transaction; and
- (3) The Head of Cultural and Trading Services be authorised to pursue proposals for a bid for HLF Resilience Funding and other funding options and actions necessary to implement the findings of the review and in particular those matters set out in paragraph 3.4 to this report.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 Gloucester City Council currently operates two museums. **The Museum of Gloucester** (previously the City Museum) is based at premises in Brunswick Road, Gloucester. **The Gloucester Life Museum** (previously the Folk Museum) is based

in Westgate Street. The two museums are managed and operated jointly. Following changes to the staffing structure resulting from the Together Gloucester review, from June 2017 the two premises will be operationally managed as part of Cultural and Traded Services by the Visitor Experience team. The programme of events, exhibitions, marketing, learning and engagement at the museums will be delivered by the Cultural Development Team.

3.2 There have been a number of significant changes to the shape and structure of the City's museums service in recent years.

- 2003 - the Transport Museum was sold to fund improvements to the City and Folk Museums
- 2004 - restrictions to the opening hours of the Folk Museum were reversed due to public demand.
- 2008 - £755,000 of Heritage Lottery Funds (HLF) were secured and invested to improve learning and engagement – including investment in the “Ed Shed”, improve displays and diversify income streams to help make both museums financially sustainable.
- 2011 - the City Museum reopened after a major refit offering “The Story of Gloucester” and a remodelled café on the ground floor, the “Ed Shed” reopened with a replacement Victorian Classroom, improved cloakroom and toilet facilities and a landscaped garden. Admission charges were introduced.
- 2013 - £500,000 capital funding was earmarked for improvements to the upstairs galleries at the City Museum.
- 2014 - some of the capital funding was rescheduled to tackle roof repairs, a further HLF funding bid was unsuccessful, the café at the Folk Museum closed and the café at the City Museum began to struggle financially. £43,000 was awarded by the Arts Council England (ACE) to purchase new furniture for the Ed Shed, enhance the Victorian Schoolroom experience for participating schools and upgrade the lighting to LED. An external independent review of the Museums Service was commissioned by the Council from Michael and Partners.
- 2015 - budget savings targets of £132,000 were included in the Council's Money Plan and Savings Plans, admission charges were increased, a catering review recommended the closure of the loss making café at the Museum of Gloucester and the City and Folk Museums were rebranded,
- 2016 - the City Council launched its Cultural Strategy, began the establishment of a Culture Trust and bid for £1.5m funding from HLF/ACE and Historic England to fund a £3.1m Great Place Scheme.
- 2017 – The City secured Great Place funding of £1.49m. Together Gloucester established a new Cultural and Traded Services Team incorporating a Visitor Experience Team to manage delivery of the Council's principal cultural venues and a Cultural Development Team to manage a programme of events, exhibitions, promotions, displays, education and learning backed by a marketing team.

3.3 In order to ensure that the City's museums service was able to operate successfully within the constraints of reducing local authority budgets and contribute fully to delivering the objectives set out in the Cultural Vision and Strategy and also achieve the outcomes sought from the Great Place project the Cabinet Lead and Corporate Director invited Jill Shonk from the County Council's Archive Service to critically review the existing service. Jill was asked to consider the continued relevance of the previous studies and reviews, assess how the service currently operates and

identify the pressures, problems and opportunities it faces, review how comparable services are delivered elsewhere and make recommendations on how best to take the service forward.

3.4 The final report is comprehensive, considered and timely. The headline findings are these:-

- 3.4.1 The museums services are in a financially vulnerable position and budgets and the capacity to address the financial situation are stretched by operating across two sites.
- 3.4.2 Access to significant future grant funding is limited because the 2008 HLF funding did not achieve the predicted increases in visitor numbers and the 2014 HLF bid failed to focus sufficiently on access and participation.
- 3.4.3 The Council needs to re-establish its ability to deliver successful audience development and engagement programmes via the implementation of smaller projects achieving measurable outcomes.
- 3.4.4 An assessment using the “Resilient Heritage Health Checker Tool” indicated an ongoing need for external support to assist in making the service sustainable; a requirement to focus on improved marketing; a need to revisit service specific plans and strategies to plug emerging gaps, develop an improved track record and strengthen the service in regard to quality, impact and stakeholder relationships.
- 3.4.5 The capacity of the museums service to deliver change is limited because the service lacks strategic leadership and project development and management capacity and because the team is overstretched by the demands of running two venues.

3.5 The report recommends:

- 3.5.1 Agreement to focus the service on a single venue and adopt an invest to save approach to enhance the museums offer
- 3.5.2 Consider an approach to the HLF Resilience Fund for a Resilience Grant to help deliver
 - a) A managed exit strategy from two venues to one
 - b) An options/development plan for the single venue
 - c) Audience development
 - d) Consultation around a future application for a major capital project at the single location.
- 3.5.3 Develop proposals for a major HLF funded capital and activities development programme
- 3.5.4 Implement a comprehensive Development Activities Plan to be delivered over the short and medium terms as part of the Resilience Fund and Major Capital Works projects to provide a clear mission and vision, a sustainable structure/governance arrangement, sound and secure premises, an audience/visitor plan, an improved exhibitions and events programme, a well-stocked shop, a café that adds value to the service and contributes to high standards of customer care, a good online presence (providing information, purchasing and payment facilities, social networking and formal and informal learning), customer insight, a volunteer strategy and a “Friends” or Development Trust to broaden participation and engagement and increase access to external funding

3.5.5 A revised staffing structure to deliver strategic leadership, management capacity, access to the necessary expertise and appropriately trained and qualified staff.

3.6 **Actions and Options** – Since receiving the report a number of actions and options have been explored or implemented which seek to address the recommendations.

3.7 **Together Gloucester** – The Together Gloucester review has sought to address some of the capacity and management issues. The new structure will provide a Head of Cultural and Traded Services able to deliver stronger leadership and management to the service. The establishment of a Visitor Experience Team seeks to broaden the award winning success of the TIC across all of the City Council's cultural venues including the museums and build greater operational resilience. The creation of a Cultural Development team seeks to deliver a more co-ordinated cultural programme, better marketing and strengthen the audience engagement and learning delivered by the museums' curatorial staff. A consolidated food and drinks team led by a new manager will be tasked with delivering commercially sustainable catering services that enhance the experience of visiting the City Council's venues.

3.8 **Gloucestershire Museums Development Service** – The City Council is working closely with the Gloucestershire Museums Development Officer – also a member of the City's Cultural Trust/Board. This co-operation is designed to ensure that successful appointments are made to the current vacancies in the new Together Gloucester structures. In addition we are working together on the potential for a bid to the HLF Resilience Fund to take forward many of the recommendations set out in para 3.4 above. The Museums Development Officer is also supporting the City Council's discussions with the Gloucester Civic Trust on the future of the Gloucester Life Museum site in Westgate Street,

3.9 **Gloucester Civic Trust/Gloucester Life Museum site** – The City Council has been approached by the Gloucester Civic Trust about the future of the site which currently houses the Gloucester Life Museum. Discussions are at an early stage but the Trust is interested in taking ownership of the site in order to deliver a range of activities including:

3.9.1 An administrative and operational headquarters for the Trust

3.9.2 A base for the Trust's expanding volunteer organisation

3.9.3 A starting and end point for Civic Trust guided tours and City walks

3.9.4 A venue for heritage and Trust related displays and exhibitions

3.9.5 A location for continuing heritage based education and learning

3.9.6 A café and restroom/toilets for visitors, volunteers and the public

3.9.7 Facilities for income-generating room hire

3.9.8 A programme of repair, refurbishment and restoration of this historically important city centre building led by an organisation with a passion for the City's built heritage.

3.10 To support the Civic Trust in its due diligence process the City Council has shared the reports and surveys we hold about the condition of the building, the budgets we hold to maintain, repair and operate and information about the income we have generated through room hire etc.

- 3.11 If these discussions were to conclude successfully they would provide an opportunity to plan and implement a managed decant from two museum locations to one, whilst still preserving the Westgate Street site for future heritage related activity, public access and a sustainable programme of managed and sympathetic repair and restoration. It would support the development and expansion of the Civic Trust and their growing volunteer numbers and would be broadly consistent with the objectives of the HLF and ACE funding invested in 2008 and 2014.
- 3.12 If the actions and options outlined above are endorsed following consideration of this report is it intended that an HLF Resilience Fund grant application is prepared and submitted later this year; that discussions continue with the Gloucester Civic Trust around appropriate heads of terms for the transfer of the site to the trust, and a managed decant of the museum's collection from storage and display in the Gloucester Life Museum potentially starting in Autumn 2017 after the History festival; and that we confirm with HLF and ACE their agreement that the proposals do not frustrate previous awards of funds.

4.0 Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) Considerations

- 4.1 The potential transfer of the current Gloucester Life Museum site in Westgate Street to a well-established charitable organisation with a track record of heritage related activity in the City and a growing volunteer base would represent a strong ABCD outcome. It offers the potential to entrust the building to an organisation well placed to manage its protection and renovation and able to access a broader range of funding than is possible through the City Council. It would also provide the Civic Trust with a base from which to expand its activities, support its volunteering and contribute further to the cultural development of the City.

5.0 Alternative Options Considered

- 5.1 A wide range of alternative options were considered as part of the review undertaken by Jill Shonk. Options included retaining both the Museum of Gloucester and the Gloucester Life Museum, consolidating the service at one or other of the two sites, seeking a new, purpose built venue (either shared or stand-alone), exploring alternative governance models (restructuring, outsourcing, creating a museums trust, community asset transfer). The conclusion was that a number of fundamental issues – premises, leadership, vision and strategy, development plans, audience development and engagement and capital investment needed to be addressed before any of the alternative options became viable or sustainable.

6.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 The recommendations seek to welcome the findings of a comprehensive report into the operation of the City's Museums Service and adopt and implement the recommendations. This is achieved in part by changes and actions already underway, by pursuing the potential of a transfer of the Gloucester Life Museum site to the Gloucester Civic Trust and by developing plans as part of a bid for HLF Resilience Funding and subsequently a major capital works application to address other elements of the review report.

- 6.2 Taken together the proposals present a comprehensive, reasoned and practical response to the Review Report and seek to implement a solution which addresses the needs of the service whilst also supporting the development plans of a significant partner organisation which shares the City Council's commitment to the preservation, enhancement, access to and interpretation of the City's heritage.

7.0 Future Work and Conclusions

- 7.1 This is a significant programme of work which will involve negotiation and compliance management to secure a lawful transfer of the site; development of a comprehensive HLF Resilience Fund Bid, a managed decant from the vacated premises, over time, with suitable arrangements for the safe and secure storage of the museum's collections which are not in public display and the development and implementation of an extensive range of strategies, policies and plans to take the service forward.

8.0 Financial Implications

- 8.1 Building running costs, including insurance and business rates, have been in the region of £65k per annum over the last two financial years. If the building were to be transferred from the Authority then it is anticipated that these costs would be saved.
- 8.2 The museum in its current form generated gross income of £35k in 2016/17. Although this income would no longer be received this should be offset by savings produced by focusing the museums service on a single venue.

(Financial Services have been consulted in the preparation this report.)

9.0 Legal Implications

- 9.1 The City Council has a statutory duty to secure the best consideration reasonably obtainable when disposing of the freehold or long leasehold interest in a property. Disposals at an undervalue are permitted where the value foregone is less than £2m and Councillors are of the opinion that to do so is for the social, economic or environmental benefit of the City or its inhabitants. It is good practice to link such deliberations with existing strategies and policies if possible.
- 9.2 The City Council will have to comply with HLF requirements imposed on the Gloucester Life Museum before the transfer is affected or agree the transfer of those obligations to the Civic Trust. If the City Council applies for HLF funding on the remaining building then obligations are likely to be imposed on the Council in respect of that application.
- 9.2 In making the changes set out in this report the council will need to have due regard to its equality duty as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 and also to the duty to consult in accordance with its best value obligations as set out in section 3(2) of the Local Government Act 1999.

(One Legal have been consulted in the preparation this report.)

10.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 10.1 The review report questions the long term sustainability of the Museums Service operating across two distinct venues. This points to a real risk in choosing a “do nothing” option.
- 10.3 HLF and ACE funding has been secured to implement improvements and developments at the Gloucester Life Museum. Discussions remain on-going about the implications of the proposals contained in this report with both organisations. There is a risk that if either or both, do not accept that the proposals remain consistent with the original funded purposes, partial repayment may be required and future grant applications may be jeopardised.
- 10.3 The proposals set out in this report depend upon our being able to agree terms with the Civic Trust and the Trust being comfortable with the responsibilities associated with the transfer of the building to them. There is a risk that agreement will not be reached and other alternatives will have to be explored.
- 10.4 Any application for funding carries a risk that the bid will not be successful. The City Council is in discussions with HLF to manage this risk and the proposals have been developed with the support of the County Museums Development Officer. We know that the HLF Resilience Fund is designed to support the sort of service development challenges we are seeking to address.

11.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):

- 11.1 The PIA Screening Stage was completed and did not identify any potential or actual negative impact, therefore a full PIA was not required.

12.0 Other Corporate Implications

Community Safety

- 12.1 None

Sustainability

- 12.2 These proposals seek to improve the sustainability both the City Museums Service and the development of the Civic Trust, whilst also enhancing the likelihood of managed and sustainable investment in the protection of the historic site in Westgate Street.

Staffing & Trade Union

- 12.3 None. These proposals do not seek to have any impact on staffing. Existing staff employed to work at the Gloucester Life Museum will be redeployed to support activity at other City Council venues. This is consistent with the revised role profiles developed as part of the Together Gloucester process.