

NORFOLK JOINT MUSEUMS & ARCHAEOLOGY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 18 November 2011

Present:

Norfolk County Council

Mr J Carswell
Mr M Carttiss
Mr P Hardy
Mr M Kiddle-Morris
Mrs J Leggett (Substitute for Mr B Stone)
Mr J Rogers
Mr J Ward (Chairman)
Mr M Wilby

Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk

Mrs E Nockolds

Breckland District Council

Mr P Duigan

Norwich City Council

Mr D Bradford
Mr G Gee
Ms V Thomas

Broadland District Council

Mr J Bracey

Great Yarmouth Borough Council

Mr B Collins

North Norfolk District Council

Mrs L Brettle

South Norfolk Council

Mr C Kemp

Co-Opted Member

Museum Friends

Mr J Knight (Substitute for Mr R Gurney)

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mr B Stone and Mr R Gurney.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 July 2011 were confirmed by the Joint Committee and signed by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Matters of Urgent Business

The Chairman agreed to take as urgent business a report that provided the general update on the work of the Norwich Museums which was considered at Item 6(d).

5 Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

6 Reports on the Activities of Area Museums

(a) Breckland

The annexed report of the Breckland Area Museums Committee meeting held on 14 October 2011 was received and noted.

In introducing the report, Mr P Duigan referred to the wide range of activities that were taking place at the Ancient House Museum at Thetford which were encouraging repeat visits to this community museum by those living in the area.

The Cabinet Member for Cultural Services referred to NMAS participation in the Heritage Lottery Fund's Skills for the Future programme which was addressing a regional shortage of work based training opportunities in traditional skills, particularly focused on heritage landscape management and rural heritage collections at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse.

(b) King's Lynn and West Norfolk

The annexed report of the King's Lynn and West Norfolk Area Museums Committee meeting held on 17 October 2011 was received and noted. In introducing the report, Mrs E Nockolds said that the Lynn Museum was in the free admission period that ran from October 2011 to March 2012. She said that the temporary exhibition Memories of Lynn: King's Lynn since the 60s that was on display at the Lynn Museum was enabling people to share their experience of changes in the town since the 1960s. This exhibition had served as the focus for a number of community events and activities in King's Lynn.

(c) North Norfolk

The annexed report of the North Norfolk Museums Forum meeting held on 28 September 2011 was received and noted.

In introducing the report, Mrs L Brettle said that while the resources that had been put into creating and promoting the latest events programme for Cromer Museum were having a very positive effect, the general attendance figures for Cromer Museum were slightly down on last year.

(d) Norwich

The Joint Committee received on the table a general update report on the Norwich Museums.

In introducing the report, Mr D Bradford referred to the building and

display installation work at the Bridewell Museum which was now scheduled to open in June 2012.

7 To Receive the Report of the Norfolk Archaeological Services Advisory Committee

The annexed report of the Norfolk Archaeological Services Advisory Committee meeting held on 10 October 2011 was received and noted.

In introducing the report, Mr P Duigan referred to a county-wide meeting about heritage crime that had been held at Reepham on 20 October 2011. He said that one of the speakers at this event was a Chief Inspector on secondment with English Heritage who had been given the task of developing better working practices and information sharing between the Police, local authorities and English Heritage. The Joint Committee was of the view that the support of the Police was crucial in tackling heritage crime in a county that had a wide range of valuable heritage assets.

8 Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service: Integrated Performance, Finance and Risk Monitoring Report for 2011/12

The annexed report by the Head of Museums and Archaeology was received.

The Joint Committee received a report that provided performance and risk details against service plans and service outturns information for the NMAS as at 30 September 2011.

In the course of discussion, the following key points were made:

- The NMAS revenue budget and reserves and provisions were expected to break even at year-end.
- The capital programme was continuing with some delays to programmes mainly caused by planning permissions.
- Funding was available to complete the minor works project at the Lynn Museum. This would see improvements being made to the museum entrance.
- It was suggested that there could be potential risks associated with the Localism Act around the potential transfer of services and assets to community and third sector organisations that should be carefully considered when the risk register was next reviewed.
- The economic situation did not appear to be preventing people from visiting museums. Visitor figures and income were down on last year (which was seen as an exceptional year) but the reduction was less than had been feared and the figures compared well with those for 2009/10.
- It was pointed out that the Museums Pass rewarded loyal customers of the NMAS in giving unlimited access to NMAS museums and discounts in museum shops and in the cafes at Norwich Castle and Gressenhall.

Resolved –

That the Joint Committee note the report.

9 Service and Budget Planning 2012-2014

The annexed report by the Head of Museums and Archaeology was received.

The Joint Committee received a report that set out the financial and planning context for the NMAS for the next two years.

In the course of discussion, the following key points were made:

- There was a risk associated with a lack of capacity in IT systems to support NMAS museums outside Norwich that could lead to a breakdown in services to the public such as ticketing and admissions. This issue was being addressed by the County Council and did appear on the risk register.
- It was pointed out that officers were working with colleagues in Adult Social Care to identify those NMAS services that could be provided to older people with personal budgets.
- Members asked for the implications of “the speed and severity of changes in service delivery” on staff to be carefully monitored by officers.
- The Head of Museums referred to how the NMAS was participating in a Fellowship Scheme whereby curators were paid through a grant from the Monument Trust to return to the museums where they once worked to share their unwritten knowledge about the museums’ collections with present staff and volunteers.

Resolved –

That the Joint Committee note the following:

- The revised service and financial planning context and assumptions
- The revised spending pressures and savings for the NMAS
- The proposed list of new and amended capital schemes.

10 NMAS Museum Catering Operations

The annexed report by the Head of Museums and Archaeology was received.

The Joint Committee received a report that provided an update on the catering service as requested at the July 2010 meeting of the Joint Committee.

In the course of discussion, the following key points were made:

- Improvements in service delivery and efficiency of the catering operations at Norwich Castle and at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse had been implemented and these changes were bringing expenditure in line with

income.

- The NMAS had entered into a trading arrangement with an outside catering outlet to provide catering facilities at Time and Tide at Great Yarmouth. In reply to questions, it was pointed out that while there were other catering outlets within the area of Time and Tide, the majority of them could not provide a catering operation that was suitable for a wide museum audience. There was highly visible signage at the front of Time and Tide about the catering operation and people could use the catering facility without visiting the Museum.

Resolved –

That the Joint Committee note:

- The progress that has been made with the catering service since it was transferred from NCS (NORSE) in February 2008
- Improvements made to the catering “offer”
- Changes to staffing
- Changes to how catering was delivered at Time and Tide
- An appraisal of the financial position including a profit and loss statement and a revised business plan with recommendations to make further improvements.

11 NMAS Collections and Accommodation Rationalisation Programme 2010-14

The annexed report by the Head of Museums and Archaeology was received.

The Joint Committee received a report that set out a list of items which had been assessed as surplus to NMAS’ requirements as being of poor quality, of limited interest, or more relevant to another museum collection.

Mr Alan West, Curator of Archaeology, said that the Archaeology Department had received a request for the return of some human skeletal material for reburial from the Jewish community of Norwich. The material was that from a Well Burial discovered in 2004 during the Chapelfield Mall development.

Mr West went on to say that at the end of 2010 Shine TV contacted the NMAS wanting to make a programme in the BBC Two series “History: Cold Case” about the human remains found in excavation during the Chapelfield Mall development. They wanted to film the remains and subject them to a series of scientific tests at Dundee University’s Centre for Anatomy and Human Identification. Permission was given and initial filming took place in January 2011.

It was pointed out that based on initial DNA testing, the programme concluded that the remains were Jewish and were the result of a mass suicide.

The programme was broadcast on 14 June 2011 and it was following this that the request for reburial was received.

The NMAS were currently waiting for the final DNA report, undertaken using cutting edge technology from Mainz in Germany, before a final determination was made on the ethnicity of the remains.

Resolved –

That the Joint Committee agree to the rationalisation of the items listed at Appendix 2 to the report.

12 Transfer of Museums Sector Responsibilities from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council to Arts Council England

The annexed report by the Head of Museums and Archaeology was received.

The Joint Committee received a report about the transfer of responsibilities from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council to Arts Council England which outlined NMAS' proposed application to the new Renaissance Major Grants programme for funding for 2012-15.

In the course of discussion it was pointed out that there was a danger that the transfer of funding to Arts Council England could result in a significant reduction in grant opportunities that might affect some services over the next two to three years. The changes in funding arrangements were expected to see Arts Council England focus its support on “excellent, forward thinking and enterprising museums”, which should place the NMAS in a strong position with regard to the proposed application by the NMAS to the new Renaissance Major Grants programme for funding for 2012-15. It was noted that should this grant application be successful, then officers would develop a detailed business plan and take the views of Members into account.

Resolved –

That the Joint Committee note the change of responsibility for museums and libraries previously held by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council to Arts Council England and the proposed application by the NMAS to the new Renaissance Major Grants programme for funding for 2012-15.

The meeting concluded at 3.30pm.

Chairman



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