

NORFOLK JOINT MUSEUMS & ARCHAEOLOGY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 15 February 2013

Present:

Norfolk County Council

Mr M Carttiss
Mr Michael Chenery of Horsbrugh (Substitute)
Mrs H Cox
Mr J Joyce
Mr J Rogers
Mr B Stone
Mr J Ward (Chairman)
Mr A J Wright

Norwich City Council

Mr D Bradford
Mrs G Gee
Mrs V Thomas (substitute)

Broadland District Council

Mr D Buck (substitute)

Breckland District Council

Mr P J Duigan

North Norfolk District Council

Mrs L Brettle

Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk

Mrs E Nockolds

Great Yarmouth Borough Council

Mrs K S Robinson-Payne

South Norfolk District Council

Dr C Kemp

Co-Opted Members (Non – Voting)

Museum Friends

Mr J Knight

Museums in Norfolk Group

Ms S Potts

1 Apologies and New Member

Apologies for absence were received from Mr J Bracey (Broadland District Council), Mr M Stonard (Norwich City Council), Miss J Toms (Norfolk County Council) and Mr M Wilby (Norfolk County Council).

The Chairman welcomed Mr Joyce as a new member of the Joint Committee.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 November 2012 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

There were no matters of urgent business.

5 Public Question Time

The were no public questions.

6 To Receive Reports of Area Museums Committees

(a) Breckland

The Joint Committee received on the table the report of the Breckland Area Museums Committee meeting held on 1 February 2013 which was noted.

In introducing the report, Mr Duigan said that the February meeting was unable to meet the requirements for a quorum and it therefore did not consider the position that Breckland District Council should take on the Museums Review. In the absence of Mr Duigan, who was otherwise engaged on County Council business, the meeting was chaired by Mr Kiddle-Morris. Those Members who were present at the meeting had received reports about the Ancient House Museum of Thetford Life and Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum, for information purposes only.

(b) Norwich

The annexed report of the Norwich Area Museums Committee meeting held on 11 December 2013 was received and noted.

Mr Bradford asked Members to note the report and to consider the comments made by the Area Museums Committee about the Museums Review and the rationalisation of museum collections when they considered items on these issues elsewhere on the Joint Committee agenda.

7 Review of Norfolk Museums Service

The annexed report by the Cabinet Member for Cultural Services, Customer Service and Communications was received. The Joint Committee received a report that included as an Appendix the conclusions and recommendations of a Member Working Group that had carried out a detailed review of the NMAS for the County Council's Cabinet.

In the course of discussion the following key points were noted:

- The Cabinet Member was asked to read out the Council responses that he had received about the Review. These were from Broadland District Council, North Norfolk District Council and the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk.
- The Cabinet Member said that Broadland District Council had expressed concern about recommendation 16 which called for a much smaller Joint Committee and could mean a loss of Broadland District Council representation. Broadland District Council had also expressed similar concerns about proposed changes in the Norwich Area Museums Committee.
- North Norfolk District Council had acknowledged recommendations 1 to 4, 11, 13 and 21 but recognised that these were internal management matters for Norfolk County Council. NNDC considered a review of admission charges,

mentioned in recommendations 5 and 6, to be good business practice when undertaken alongside the development of a marketing strategy. NNDC acknowledged the concerns mentioned in recommendation 7 that the proposed changes to the membership scheme were unnecessarily complex. When tasking museums to increase their earned income from secondary spend, as in recommendation 8, NNDC wanted the Cabinet to acknowledge some venues were better placed to deliver on this aim than others, such as Cromer museum where space for such activities was likely to be restricted. Similarly, with recommendation 9, NNDC felt a museum such as Cromer would offer limited opportunities for private hire.

- With regard to opening hours, recommendation 10, NNDC supported the aspiration to increase opening hours, and recognised the need for this to be undertaken alongside the development of the business case for doing so. NNDC supported the desire to simplify opening hours although they did not believe this to be of concern specifically to Cromer Museum.
- NNDC supported recommendation 12 and believed this to be good management practice. NNDC supported the proposed reviews of the Museum Agreement, recommendation 14, and of the Joint Museum Committee, recommendation 15, but wished to ensure a simpler structure was adopted, with clear responsibilities and which was not onerous in time and administration. They also supported the suggestion to establish a separate Heritage Forum, recommendation 16, to give a focus to the wider heritage sector and provide opportunities for the many independent organisations within this sector to meet with Area Museum Managers and the Chairmen of Area Museum Committees. However, NNDC felt it was important to avoid duplication and therefore suggested consideration should be given to establishing either one forum to serve the County or separate forums to serve the Districts. NNDC also suggested consideration should be given to the role of The Museums in Norfolk Group and whether it was appropriate to consider the development of this group to further serve the independent sector. NNDC welcomed the confirmation that the choice of model for the new Joint Museums Committee would be subject to consultation and agreement of the District Councils, but wanted to recommend the development of the Heritage Forum(s) were in consultation with the independent museums.
- In line with changes to the Joint Museums Committee, and the development of the Heritage Forum(s), NNDC wanted more time to consider arrangements for managing the Service Level Agreement with Norfolk County Council to operate Cromer Museum and whether it was appropriate to reinstate the North Norfolk Area Museum Committee recommendations 17 - 18.
- NNDC supported the aims contained in recommendations 19 - 20 to address the disparity in the level of financial contributions between District Councils and to debate how best to ensure these contributions were based on a rational funding formula rather than historical precedence.
- Mrs Nockolds had responded to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council to say that they had a good working relationship with the NMAS and had generally felt involved and informed with regard to the work of the Service. KWN had a current Service Level Agreement in place for the year, which was agreed in March 2012. This set out clearly the role of the NMAS and the Borough Council, which included support for life-long learning, supporting local communities, partnership and joint working and marketing and tourism. With regard to admissions policy this was reflected in the SLA with a direct contribution towards the winter free use by the Borough.

- The current West Norfolk Area Museums Committee (WNAMC) had been operational for a considerable time. Membership of the WNAMC included five Borough Councillors, five County Councillors and other voluntary group representatives. This had been found to operate successfully and Elizabeth Nockolds had chaired the group for the last 8 years. There were always some Members who could not make the meetings but they generally had 6/7 Councillors at each meeting. The Chairman of the Joint Norfolk Museums Committee and the Head of Norfolk Museums had attended on occasions. KYWN was clear about its role in that it was able to set and influence the overall strategy but then Officers were left to deliver that. It might be that this could be formalised more by setting out a formal action plan.
- In general KLWN supported Sunday opening of the Museums if this was financially viable. However, KLWN felt this would need to be considered locally in the context of other attractions available that might attract “Heritage Visitors”. KLWN would be pleased to be involved in discussions around this possibility as well as the proposed review of fees and charges. The current admissions income for the Museum Service was in the region of £800,000 a year, a not insubstantial sum. KLWN did not believe a blanket policy of free admissions was the way forward. There were free admissions during the winter at the King’s Lynn Museum which would be more effective in increasing attractions without jeopardising a substantial source of revenue in these difficult financial times.
- In terms of the role of Officers and Members, KLWN had found this to work effectively. The WNAMC was involved in discussions around the strategy and aims for the Service but Officers then had to implement them within the resources available. The Service was very successful at this and had brought in substantial funding;
 - HLF funding for Lynn Museum.
 - HLF funding for Fenland Lives and Land project.
 - Wolfson Foundation funding for Sea Henge Gallery.
 - Funding for Youth Engagement and Learning through Renaissance in the regions.
 - Arts Council Funding.
- The overall comment from the KLWN perception was that the NMAS remained an excellent service, there were always areas for improvement but these needed to be considered in the context of the successful service that already existed.
- It was noted that the views of the Norwich Area Museums Committee were set out in minute 5 of the Area Museums Committee meeting held on 11 December 2012.
- Mrs Robinson-Payne (Great Yarmouth Borough Council) said that Great Yarmouth Borough Council could be expected to respond to the Review shortly. She added that the Borough Council had re-established an Area Museums Committee for the Great Yarmouth area which was expected to meet before the next meeting of the Joint Committee.
- Dr Kemp (South Norfolk District Council) and Mr Bradford (Norwich City Council) said that they knew of no attempt that had been made at the level of Chief Executive to formally consult with their respective Councils.
- Other Members spoke about how they considered that some Members of the Joint Committee should be taking a more “proactive approach” to the Museums

Review and should consider it their responsibility to put forward their Council's views. They spoke about how the Working Group was set up by the County Council's Cabinet to look at the governance and management of the NMAAS from the point of view of the County Council rather than to act as a consultative body with other Councils.

- Members who had served on the Cabinet Working Group as County Councillors said that while they agreed with the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Review they did not necessarily agree with everything that was said in the report's foreword.
- It was pointed out that the County Council's Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel had too large a remit to scrutinize the work of the NMAAS and that the Panel should dedicate a meeting exclusively to Cultural Services issues.
- It was suggested that the Cabinet Member should seek the views of partners in the independent sector and in the academic world, and in particular the UEA, on the Review.
- The Cabinet Member said that it would be possible for the Cabinet when it considered the Museums Review to consider comments from those Councils that had not already responded, and to consider taking up the suggestion from Members for wider consultation.
- The Cabinet Member suggested that it should be for the Joint Committee to elect whom it wanted to have as its Chairman.
- It was pointed out that the Cabinet Member and the Chairman regularly attended Area Museums Committee meetings and took an active interest in their work.
- It was also pointed out that the County Council's Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel had given its full support to the Working Group's recommendations.
- Members spoke, however, about how it was not for the Joint Committee to agree the Review recommendations which were seen by Joint Committee Members as a matter for the constituent bodies of the Museums Agreement to act upon.

The Joint Committee unanimously agreed:

- (a) To note the recommendations contained in the Review.
- (b) To ask the Cabinet Member to forward all Borough/City/District Council comments that are received about the Review to the Cabinet for when they next consider this matter.
- (c) To ask that the Cabinet consider the possibility of further consultation on the Review with independent and academic sector partners.

8 Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service – Integrated Performance and Finance Monitoring Report For 2012/13

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

The Joint Committee received a report that provided performance against NMAAS service plans and budget out-turn based on information at 30 November 2012.

The Joint Committee noted that the Service had achieved a break even budget

position at year end. After taking into account the reductions in visitor numbers there was a small reduction in admission income of £7,000 which was covered by a small increase in income from catering and sales.

9 Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service - Service and Budget Planning 2013 to 2015

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

The Joint Committee received a report that provided an update on proposals for service and financial planning for 2013 -14. The report set out the provisional financial settlement for 2013 -14 and updated information on spending pressures and savings for NMAS and the cash limited budget for 2013-14.

The Joint Committee was reminded of the financial risks facing the Service that were set out in paragraph 6.3 of the report, particularly concerning competition from the wider cultural sector and increased access to the cultural digital economy.

10 Collections For Rationalisation (including Annex 2, Proposed Objects to be De-accessioned)

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

The Joint Committee received a report that set out the background to a review of collections held by Norwich Museums, and recommended de-accessioning a group of social history items that were in poor condition, unrelated to Norwich and/or outside of the NMAS Acquisition and Disposal Policy.

It was noted that the objects listed in Annex 2 to the report would be found a home in another museum or cultural institution wherever possible. In reply to questions it was pointed out that the pneumatic power hammer (NWHCM: 1972.260) had been collected by the NMAS in the 1970's to be used as an exhibit in a proposed industrial museum which was not established. The options for the future of this item included the Gressenhall "Shine a Light" project.

In reply to further questions, it was pointed out that the dray, originally from City Station, Norwich (NWHCM 1976.203) was in need of care and attention. North Norfolk Railway had shown interest in restoring this item to its original condition and placing it on display. It was suggested by Members that Mid Norfolk Railway might be interested in receiving similar items, should the NMAS have such material for disposal again in the future, and that another option might be placing objects of this kind in a specialist railway memorabilia auction.

Resolved.

That the objects listed in Annex 2 of the report be de-accessioned.

11 Report of the NMAS Curators 2011-12

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

The Joint Committee received a report that summarised the work of the NMAS curators in 2011-12. The Joint Committee also received (on the table) copies of the full report.

It was noted that the contents of the curator report included contributions from other sectors of the Service that were closely linked with the curatorial teams in terms of county collections. Previous reports had focused on the work of curators based in Norwich. The report for 2011-12 provided an integrated picture of the creative work that was being achieved by curators from the whole countywide curatorial team, and representing all NMAS sites.

12 Vanessa Trevelyan and Bill Seaman

The Chairman and the Cabinet Member placed on record the Joint Committee's best wishes and thanks to Vanessa Trevelyan whom was due to retire from her role as Head of the NMAS at the end of March 2013. Mrs Trevelyan had been the Head of the NMAS since 1999 and was responsible for many of the significant steps forward that the Service had taken in recent years. The Joint Committee wished Vanessa Trevelyan a long and happy retirement.

Thanks were also placed on record to Bill Seaman, the Assistant Head of Museums, whom was leaving the Service to take up a new post as Head of Museums for Colchester and Ipswich Museums. The Joint Committee wished Bill Seaman well in his new post.

The meeting concluded at 3.40pm.

CHAIRMAN



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