
Culture and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission

**Museums Service
Operational Changes Update**

5th March 2026

Lead director/officer: Peter Chandler

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All.
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- Report version number: 1

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the delivery of the Museums and Galleries Strategy, focusing upon operational changes at Abbey Pumping Station and Newarke Houses Museum.

2. Museums Service Vision and Strategic Priorities

The new Museums Service Vision & Strategic Priorities 2025-29 was implemented on 1st May 2025. The vision is a high-quality cost-effective museum service with fewer, but much improved buildings and collection displays resulting from very significant capital investment.

Over the last decade £23.2m has been invested, with a further £5.6m of investment underway and planned.

Investment of £411k has been secured from The National Lottery Heritage Fund for a development stage grant at Leicester Museum & Art Gallery.

Taken together this represents a total of £29.2m capital investment in the museum service.

The Service's long-term strategy realigns resources to use them more efficiently and develop the museum service, making it more relevant to Leicester people and better showcasing our history, community stories and world class collections. There will be improved access to Leicester's social history collection through the creation of new *Story of Leicester* galleries at Leicester Museum & Art Gallery. In early 2025 a development stage National Lottery Heritage Fund grant of £411k was secured for this project and work is underway on this.

Previously other funding was secured by the museums service for the Leicester Museum & Art Gallery capital project, including £350k from Arts Council England for the Leicester Stories Gallery which opened in 2022 and £766k of Arts Council England MEND funding for essential repairs to the building as part of the improvement works which are currently underway.

The museums service has secured Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) investment every year since 2018 with funding in place until 31st March 2027. Investment between 2018-23 was £2m in total and for 2023-26 is £1.2m. The service recently secured further NPO funding of £434k, giving a total investment figure of £3.6m This funding is being used to develop and deliver a range of inclusive and accessible activities and programmes, including exhibitions, co production programmes, income generation, collections access, offsite museums activity and volunteer development.

3. Offsite Activities

The museum service has been working to increase the level of activity it undertakes across the city beyond museum sites. Through a hub and spoke model, museum services are being delivered outside of museum buildings and developing our non-traditional audiences, which is a core objective of our strategy. The museum service has already established a successful programme taking the museum and collections out into communities outside of the city centre to reach non-traditional museum visitors and to make museums more accessible, for example, to Neighbourhood Centres, libraries, shopping centres and festivals. There was a 28% increase in offsite engagement from 61,609 in 2018/19 to 79,017 in 2023/24. All activities are free for participants and examples include the Doorstep Museums initiative in 2024 at The Brite Centre - this engaged with 1,800 visitors and at St Barnabas Library with 500 people.

Offsite engagement has increased again to 88,331 for Quarters 1-3 (April – December) 2025/26.

4. Operational Changes

Operational changes were implemented at Newarke Houses Museum and Abbey Pumping Station on 1st May 2025. The revenue savings for the operational changes were £112k for Abbey Pumping Station and £134k for Newarke Houses Museum, with a total saving of £246k at these two sites.

The rearrangement of the service is not an overall reduction of the museums service. Once we have completed capital improvement works at Leicester Museum and Art Gallery by 2029/30, we anticipate that visitor figures across all museum sites and offsite will increase from 515,241 (2024/25 when the Vision and Strategic Priorities were implemented) to around 560,000. This includes an adjustment reflecting the changes at Newarke Houses Museum and Abbey Pumping Station.

5. Abbey Pumping Station

Abbey Pumping Station is open on event days, railway days, Steam with the Team days and Mondays during LCC school holidays (excluding Christmas). School visits continue to be provided. Access has continued to be provided for the Leicester Museum Technology Association (LMTA) volunteers to continue their work programme on Mondays which includes maintaining the working collections and beam engines. Gardening volunteers also participate at the site on Mondays.

In September 2025 the Food and Craft Fair previously held at Belgrave Hall was transferred to Abbey Pumping Station. This event had 1,924 visitors across the weekend. In 2024 The Food Fair held at Belgrave Hall had a total of 1,126 visitors giving a 70% increase in visitor numbers at the Abbey Pumping Station event compared to at Belgrave Hall. Positive feedback was received from members of the public and stallholders. The museums team is planning to repeat this event at Abbey Pumping Station this year.

6. Children and Young People

During July and August 2025, the Holiday Activities & Food programme was delivered at Abbey Pumping Station. Children and young people who receive benefits related free school meals

can participate in LCC's free holiday activities and food (HAF) programme over the summer holiday. The museums service is a HAF provider and during the summer of 2025 provided a HAF programme at Abbey Pumping Station for 6–11-year-olds with a total of 416 participations. The programme enables children to participate in activities at the museum and to have a nutritious meal as part of their visit.

Abbey Pumping Station – Public Access 1st May 2025 – 9th February 2026

Activity	Attendance Numbers
Existing events.	3,200
Railway Days.	3,948
Steam With the Team.	301
LCC School Holiday Mondays.	2,001
New events and hires.	1,766
Transferred event – Food & Craft Fair September 2025.	1,927
School visits and Holiday Activity & Food programme.	577
LMTA volunteers (88 days).	1,544
Garden volunteers.	443
Total	15,707
Heritage bus weekend event offsite at Great Central Railway Quorn & Woodhouse Station.	3,100
Total – Abbey Pumping Station & Offsite.	18,807

Prior to the operational changes being implemented annual attendance numbers at Abbey Pumping Station were 41,000 on average per year.

7. Newarke Houses Museum

Newarke Houses Museum is open on Saturdays and on Wednesdays (during LCC school holidays) between May to August. This ensures continued public access during peak visitor times including the school summer holiday period.

In addition to these usual opening days Newarke Houses Museum opened on Sunday 8th June as part of the *Siege of Leicester* event programme and on Saturday 20th September as part of the Heritage Open Days programme. Organisations and groups can hire the museum and there is currently a group which regularly hires space within the building.

Supporting Leicester's children and young people is a key element of the new strategy and school visits have continued to be provided at Newarke Houses Museum since 1st May 2025.

The garden at Newarke Houses Museum continues to be maintained. Recently the trees in front of the Chantry House part of the museum have been pruned to make the museum and building more visible, enabling the 16th century architecture to be appreciated.

Newarke Houses Museum – Public Access 1st May 2025 – 9th February 2026

Activity	Attendance Numbers
Saturdays (May – August).	2,689
Wednesdays during LCC school holidays May - August).	1,450
Other events, including the Siege of Leicester.	636
School pupils visiting.	555
Private hires.	1,477
Total	6,807

Prior to the operational changes being implemented, annual attendance numbers at Newarke Houses Museum were 41,000 on average per year.

8. Conclusion

The museums service is on track to deliver the Museums and Galleries Vision and Strategic Objectives by 2029. The service is being delivered both at museum sites and via offsite activities which take collections into neighbourhoods.

5. Recommended actions/decision

To note and comment on this report.

6. Scrutiny / stakeholder engagement

Stakeholders were informed of the operational changes in March 2025.

7. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

7.1 Financial implications

The financial performance of the museums service, including the changes identified in this commentary, continue to be reported and scrutinised on a quarterly basis at operational and strategic level. Should any financial risks or further opportunities emerge, these will be identified for decision making.

Joel Martin, Principal Accountant Ext 374002 (on behalf of Stuart McAvoy, Head of Finance)
20 February 2026

7.2 Legal implications

The report includes various positive outcomes from strategic and operational improvements that have been recently introduced to the service.

There are no apparent adverse (or other) legal implications from the content of this report.

Emma Young, Qualified Lawyer
18 February 2026

7.3 Equalities implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't. · Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

It provides an update on the operational changes and strategic realignment of the Museums Service following the implementation of their 2025–2029 Vision. Initiatives that aim to create experiences that involve and inspire residents and visitors, sharing the city's significant collections, that celebrate the stories of Leicester's diverse communities and the unique places, art and heritage which shape the city's identity and showcasing these to the world should lead to positive impacts for people from across all protected characteristics. Involvement in art, heritage and culture has the potential to enrich people's lives, having accessible experiences should help to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't. The Museums Service is now reaching a wider range of people by taking activities directly into local neighbourhoods. Programs like the summer food and activity scheme ensure that all children, regardless of their family's income, have a chance to enjoy Leicester's culture and history.

Equalities Officer, Surinder Singh Ext 37 4148

Dated 18 February 2026

7.4 Climate Emergency implications

There are no significant climate emergency implications arising from this report.

Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer, Ext 372246
18th February 2026

6.5 Other implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

None

8. Is this a private report (If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

No

10. Is this a “key decision”? If so, why?

No