

5. CREATING A SUSTAINABLE MUSEUM SERVICE

The review identified a number of issues that need to be addressed in order to deliver effective services. The current situation is not sustainable for the following reasons:

- Public facilities at sites are in need of improvement- buildings need refurbishing and access needs improving at most sites.
- The present configuration and remit of the service means there is an inadequate balance between resources to support current activities, and to develop new activities to respond to the neighbourhood agenda.
- Limited income generation & inward investment
- Lack of a collections development strategy to make best use of collections resources, linked to lack of space in stores
- The current service is not responding sufficiently to the needs of the diverse communities of the city

All of these things have resulted in declining standards across all sites, limited collecting for the 21st Century and limited outreach provision.

5.1 Limited financial resources

5.1.1. In 2000/01 Focus Consultants carried out a major review of the service, analysing all of its activities and resources, and carrying out options appraisals on key buildings to establish priorities and develop a capital strategy.

They concluded:

The museum service is significantly under resourced within its current remit. To achieve a truly revitalised service, of which Leicester City Council and voters can be proud, the same investment needs to be maintained for a more strategically compact service, for the foreseeable future, especially if the service is not to deteriorate as it has under previous governance

(p23 “evidence to confirm the core brief”)

The Museum Service in its current configuration is not sustainable if it is to provide an effective and efficient service that is relevant to customers and supports Neighbourhood Renewal. Benchmarking data shows that the spend per site is 20% less than comparator museums, and that Leicester has more operational sites than the average for comparator museums. Benchmarking comparators suggest that the 2002/3 revenue budget of £2,145,000 would need to be increased to at least £2,400,000 if six museums and a collection the size of Leicester's are to be adequately maintained and make a meaningful contribution to the life of the city. This would be welcome, but not very likely, and living in hope is not a realistic strategy for dealing with this situation. The only option is to make the best possible use of existing resources. Even if an increase in revenue budgets was under consideration, the Council would expect existing resources to be used wisely.

5.1.2. Consultation with stakeholders informs this option:

- Leicester must modernise itself with a new museum building, a modern museum with a modern message.
- Could justify closing 1-3 of the old buildings if staff were transferred to new one.
- Number of museums neither here nor there- the buildings should enable broader aims. Criteria for keeping or reducing would be- are they doing more of the same or do they each provide a different perspective. (**Appendix Five A5.3.7**)
- More outreach needed but concern expressed that more outreach could mean reduction of in-house museum provision (**Appendix Five, A5.3.1, 2 and 3**)
- Need to invest in site refurbishments. (**Appendix Five, A5.3.1, 2 and 3**)
- Retain the six museums – their diversity is their strength and bases are needed for outreach. (**Appendix Five, A5.3.1, 2 and 3**)
- Leicester City Museums' funding is only sufficient for a local museums service only, yet it has a regional and national collection to look after. **Appendix Five, A5.3.1, 2 and 3**)
- Do not close sites as all are historic buildings/sites covering 2000 years. **Appendix Five, A5.4.3**)
- Can't keep six museums going with existing budget. (**Appendix Five, A5.5**)

- Need to change what is on display in museums more regularly; museums need a part that is changed regularly. (**Appendix Five**, A5.5)
- 6 or 4 sites? The importance is the totality of the service not any individual museum. (**Appendix Five**, A5.5)
- Would not regard it as a major service reduction if all museums were not open for the full 12 months. (**Appendix Five**, A5.5)

5.2 Size of Collections

Few cities have such an outstanding resource as Leicester's collections, but it is barely used. Their scale and subject range stretch the service to capacity and paradoxically make it difficult to use them to best advantage. Every store is full and most are in inaccessible or unsuitable buildings. Because of lack of space the collections have not been systematically developed for many years and so they do not reflect 20th and 21st Century Leicester.

5.2.1. Lack of collections development

The service has been collecting for over 150 years; these collections include local, regional, national and international material in a very wide range of subject areas. It is one of the largest collections of any regional service in the United Kingdom with approximately two million items. Until the 1970's when the first collections policy was developed, collections were accumulated without a strategic rationale, and although there have been collections development programmes since then, by and large collections are still collected passively by making decisions on objects offered to the service. Although the service recognises the need for proactive collecting to reflect the diversity of Leicester's modern communities, this has been not done due to lack of storage space, the need to manage the existing collections, and lack of a strong commitment to do so. This review proposes significant changes to current practice, which will be incorporated into the next revision of the Collections Policy.

5.2.2. Little systematic rationalisation

The review identifies the need for a strategic approach to collections to ensure that we are adequately able to collect for the present and future to be reflective of the communities we serve.

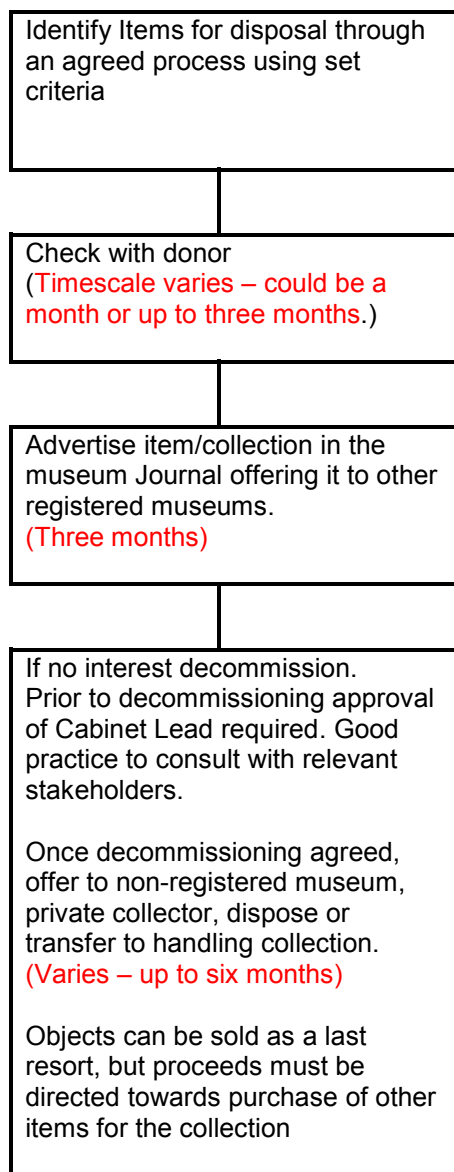
In 1997 the Museum Service transferred to Leicester City Council as part of Local Government reorganisation. A collections sharing agreement was drawn up, and since then work has been continuously carried out to allocate items to the County Museum Service. There are still a large number of items that need to be transferred due to the time consuming nature of this work. This process needs to be speeded up and the collections sharing agreement needs to be reviewed to identify any further areas where collections can be potentially transferred over. In addition, collection sharing with Rutland must also be progressed.

The collections sharing operation has demonstrated the time consuming nature of any rationalisation programme. Moreover, any rationalisation of collections has to be done following nationally recognised ethical guidelines. Even so, it is clear that a more vigorous slimming down operation should be carried out to very sensitively identify and ethically dispose of collections that are less relevant to Leicester but more relevant to other organisations. In addition the considerable amount of material that has no ethical restrictions will be reviewed and disposed of. Another area where there is room for rationalisation is the return of the many loaned items that are not on display. It may be that once the most simple and effective disposals have been carried out it will not be cost effective to deal with the remainder, and other management methods will need to be considered.

Paradoxically, the large scale of the collections is a tremendous asset, but it is also a liability because of the resources needed to store and care for them and the lack of ability to get access to them or information about them. Collections are however the lifeblood of a museum- they are the basis of its core service. Many people are completely unaware of Leicester's collections, and fail to realise that prioritising collections focused work is necessary because only by doing so will a major part of Leicester's heritage be unlocked for everyone to use and enjoy.

Therefore sufficient resources need to be directed towards making the collections more usable to make real progress in a reasonable length of time. (See recommendations).

Process for Disposal of Collections



5.2.3. Minimum Levels of Collections Care

The issues identified as part of the review and other previous work carried out in relation to collections care are:

Physical Collection Care

- There is currently no collections management policy or strategy.
- There is no integrated Pest Management System (e.g. insects)
- Inadequacy of storage facilities. Many stores have very poor environmental conditions. In addition the stores are in a poor state of repair and hard to access due to overcrowding, lack of study areas. This is of a particular issue with Humberstone Drive due to the condition of the current buildings.
- Current storage needs to be reorganised to make objects accessible
- Current storage material needs to be replaced as part of a rolling housekeeping programme of improvements to stores.
- Regular condition checks are not currently carried out across all sites
- Environmental monitoring systems need to be improved and extended to all sites.
- The cost of storage needs to be considered. This falls into two areas: firstly, conflict over use of space for providing direct customer services e.g. exhibition galleries, meeting areas, instead of using it for collections' storage, and secondly, the cost of using Pilot House for storage.

Documentation

- No procedural manual for documentation.
- Only a small proportion of collections are fully catalogued, and the information within catalogues is not necessarily what is most relevant to users.
- The computerised catalogue has only limited information on it, and in addition it is not in a format that is transferable to electronic public access systems directly because of technical and linguistic difficulties.
- The computerised system is not user friendly and is time consuming.
- Although the computerised catalogue has been in operation for a considerable number of years, it has not been used to its full potential.
- Little information about collections is currently available on the website

However we have begun to develop electronic public access to collections, although this only reflects a tiny proportion of collections. For instance a New Opportunities Fund project is currently developing a website based on knitting collections in the East Midlands. The Service has also attracted Heritage Lottery funding for a project, “Was Your Grandfather a Soldier”, which will enable gallery on-line access to a database of records of over 30,000 soldiers. Leicestershire Museums Arts and Records Service has just secured lottery funding for a housekeeping, rationalisation and documentation project and this example should be investigated.

It is imperative that we address the issues around the current levels of collections care and storage because these are integral to the service we provide to our users.

5.2.4. Consultation with stakeholders made the following points:

- A collections facility with public access to reserve stores could be very useful, provided it's not seen as an alternative to museum sites, i.e. achieved at the expense of closing one or more sites. (**Appendix Five**, A5.4.4)
- Problem inherited from 30 years ago with expanding museums concept; people now have 30 years or so of loyalties to a site- e.g. Wygston's House- difficult to cease operations. Rationalisation of sites would be OK as long as it was done clearly for service improvement and people understood this e.g. by having fewer, bigger sites. (**Appendix Five**, A5.5)
- Quality of service should not be judged by the quantity of sites- need for consolidation- but this should not be forced by budgetary pressures. More money may have to be provided for consolidation that improves services.
- Provision of outreach services is important. Need to explore avenues of funding to support this work. Look at the possibilities of employing a self-financing inward investment officer. (**Appendix Five**, A5.5)
- Look at income generation - corporate hospitality; investigate costs of improvements to rooms/meeting spaces. (**Appendix Five**, A5.5)

5.3. Alternative Options for Service Management

5.3.1. Museums Services as a whole

The review considered alternative options for service management. The first option was to outsource the whole service to a charitable trust or a private company. A recommendation of two previous Best Value Reviews within Cultural Services was that a strategic review should be carried out for Alternative Management by a trust or private company. In response to this consultants were commissioned in 2001 to carry this out for Arts & Leisure Services (Leonie Cowen & Associates.) The report is currently being considered by the Departmental Management Team.

The consultants concluded that it could be feasible for an NPDO (Non Profit- making Distributive Organisation) to be established encompassing a group of cultural services including museums. Building on this work the review considered the implications that this would have for museums and concluded that it may have advantages for the Museum service provided that the collections were safeguarded and registration standards are met. (In order to qualify for museum related funding such as HLF & Renaissance in the Regions museums have to be registered) The financial savings for museums would be comparatively small. We have compared Leicester's situation with that of York and Sheffield museums, which have both successfully transferred to stand alone trust management, but concluded that their situations are not totally comparable. York is a major income generating tourist attraction and Sheffield museums are more central to the agenda of the City. This work will be concluded as part of the overall Cultural services review of alternative management options being considered and any further work for museums will be built into the improvement plan.

The *Renaissance in the Regions* initiative sets up partnerships of leading regional museum services. In the long term it may be beneficial to transform these partnerships into regional museum trusts. Any development of Trust Management in Leicester should not preclude the development of such a regional trust if Leicester ever decided to go down that road.

5.3.2 Historic Buildings

In addition to the six operational museums, the service is responsible for a range of other historic buildings and sites, all of which require renovation and development. These include Belgrave House & Stables, John of Gaunt's Cellar, Leicester Castle, The Magazine, and Wygston's House, and it also needs to facilitate renovation of the Severn Trent Building at Abbey Pumping Station.

The review has explored the issue of Building Preservation Trusts and has concluded that there is potential for working with a new regeneration focused trust for Leicester to renovate these properties.

There is also potential to explore whether a trust might have a role in the management and development of the historic buildings that are used as operational Museums. Both these areas will be further explored.

5.3.3. Design

An external design company (Hayley Sharpe 2001) was commissioned to carry out an analysis of a museums exhibition (the Koelz Exhibition) to determine whether the in house provision of such an exhibition was competitive and cost effective when compared with external private sector provision. This identified that:

- At £58.00 per square metre the project budget was extremely good value for money. Current guidelines for a professionally produced art exhibition would be in the region of £800- £1,500 per square metre (dependant on levels of IT, AV, educational material and associated costs etc.)
- The Museum spent 740 hours on the project. If this was at the most expensive hourly rate, the cost to the service would have been £10,330. The same number of hours would cost approximately £30,000 if the same amount of billable time were to be spent by an outside consultancy (i.e. greater than the project budget itself).

In addition to the Koelz analysis, the major benefits identified were.

- The ability to respond to small-scale housekeeping work.
- Part of the service and understands the ethos of the service, and collections.
- Development of in-house skills

The conclusion of the consultants was that it is cost effective to retain the provision of exhibitions in house.

5.3.4. Retail

Task group 3 (Museums Operational) also looked at issues relating to outsourcing retail services.

Analysis showed that only New Walk Museum has sufficient turn-over and profit from its shop for out-sourcing to be an option. This site also supports the other five, which do not make money but are an important part of the service to our visitors. At these five sites we break even. This service should continue to be provided as it adds to the value of the visitor experience.

At present retail profits are used to support the service overall. However, if this money was to be rolled over into the following financial year and used to improve the retail service, this would enhance the service on offer, and in the long term lead to greater profits.

Consultants carried out a review of retail provision last year and as a result a retail strategy was developed. This incorporates a series of improvements, which will support the development of the service, and in turn increase profits. As a result of this income targets for retail were increased.

5.3.5. Events and Activities

Where appropriate these are already outsourced, for instance the lunchtime concert programme at New Walk Museum was outsourced in 2000 to the International Music Festival (which is a charitable organisation.). The task group concluded that the current mix of outsourcing and in-house provision should continue. This is because the

majority of events are delivered within small budgets and heavily supported through volunteer input.

5.3.6. Front of House staff

Egeria consultants also considered the potential to use volunteers instead of using paid museum assistants, but concluded that there was no case for this as this was not feasible for a local authority museum service due to:

- The commitment required – we need to ensure an adequate level of staffing cover at all times, i.e. two people on duty
- The basic duties, e.g. cleaning, which volunteers may not want to carry out.
- Finally volunteers may not be prepared to staff a Local Authority Museum Service, whilst they will staff a voluntary one, for example the Sikh Museum.

However Egeria found they could be used to supplement existing work and add value to it. Much work is already done by volunteers already e.g. collections care, data input, Guildhall shop, and where possible this will be increased.

The arrangements for out of hours security which was previously part of the role of Museum Assistants was considered in 2001 in order to determine the most cost effective means of provision. This work was carried out in house. This has resulted in a saving of £8,000.as a result of outsourcing this work to a private company rather than paying MA's enhanced overtime rates.

5.4. Strategic reinvestment of resources

There is a considerable amount of public support for retaining the museum service in its current form with six sites, and any change will be interpreted as a cut to the service. It is recognised that there will be dissatisfaction in many quarters about any proposed changes, as experienced in 2000 when there were substantial budget reductions see **Appendix 3**. However the same people also share the view that the museum service needs to be improved in a number of areas. This can only be achieved with either substantial budget increases, which the council is unlikely to be able to afford, or by repositioning the service and changing what it does.

The difference with this review is that it is not being done for the purposes of budget reduction, but in order to improve the services provided for all of the communities of the city, and with careful communication and explanations any reductions in service areas will be better understood.

By reinvesting more strategically in a leaner, more community focused service, museums could:

- Provide better and more accessible public/front of house facilities
- Support development of a more relevant service for a wider range of communities.
- Deliver services to communities at a neighbourhood level.
- Develop Electronic access to collections
- Improve educational services
- Increase ability to secure additional income & external funding.
- Improve access to collections in stores.
- In addition this would support higher quality facilities, which in turn are likely to attract more sponsorship, and by investing in better meeting facilities, more funds could be used through the letting of these facilities.

5.5 Increasing income generation and external funding

The review found that there is potential for increasing income from external sources, and where possible this will be carried out, e.g. retail strategy implementation. However, significantly increased income can only be achieved if the service is refocused to free up money to invest in facilities and act as partnership funding. Sponsors also need to know that the museum service is itself contributing financially to projects, and that their project will be of a certain quality.

Both existing major funders, such as HLF, and potential new funders, such as DCMS via Resource's *Renaissance in the Regions* Initiative, expect services to be well managed and sustainable as a criteria for funding, with adequate core revenue investment from their governing bodies. This too supports strategic refocusing of the service.

Issues Identified

- Not sufficient resources to maintain current number of sites
- Need to achieve a balance between current site-based activities and the need to deliver additional activities to meet the neighbourhood agenda.
- Funding only sufficient for a local service, but museums have national & regional collections.
- Need to develop income generation/funding.
- A collections strategy needs to be devised to make the Service more relevant to Leicester and it's population.
- A slimming down operation must be carried out to identify and dispose of collections that are not relevant to the diverse communities of Leicester.
- Improve retail provision through the reinvestment of profit back into the retail service.
- Examine outsourcing of the retail operation at New Walk Museum.
- Building Preservation Trusts need to be further considered to support the maintenance and development of Historic Buildings.
- Museums outsourcing will be considered as part of departmental work on Alternative Management Options.

These issues will be dealt with in Chapter 6, conclusions & recommendations.