

**Response to Overview and Scrutiny Review –
Extending access and public use of Lancashire Museums Service -
October 2010**

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Appoint a lead member for Culture and relocate Cultural Services to another Directorate i.e. Environment Directorate

The appointment of lead members is a decision for the Leader but there is already a lead member – CC David Smith – for Cultural Services. He has spent time and effort gaining valuable knowledge and understanding of all the aspects of Cultural Services, continues to visit many sites and meets staff and customers at every opportunity. He attends cabinet meetings and other committees and represents the authority at partnership meetings etc. in relation to culture and Cultural Services.

In terms of the proposal to move Cultural Services into Environment, the Service has a countywide role and does not 'neatly' fit into any specific directorate. An integrated Heritage offer – museums, archives and family and local history – is currently being developed that will focus on contributing to the understanding of Lancashire's past and developing the visitor economy potential of our sites and facilities in line with the Corporate Culture & Sport Strategy. Support for Cultural Services is strong within the wider Adult & Community Services Directorate and, consequently, it is unclear that being relocated into another directorate would have a significant impact on its profile.

Recommendation 2

Business Plan

The Museum Service has a Museum Business Plan, however, the Service recognises that there would be a benefit to the Service if the Business Plan format and structure was more relevant to the sector and focussed on feasible deliverable objectives that were clearly understood by the staff delivering the service. In 2011-12 Cultural Services will have a single, co-ordinated Business Plan which the Museums Business Plan and actions can feed into.

It is recognised that there needs to be more work undertaken on internal communications within the Service to ensure that the Business Plan is truly recognised as a living document that drives the progress of work across all areas of Cultural Services.

Recommendation 3

Branding

The Service recognises the benefits of a Museum brand. However, under current arrangements new LCC branding regulations/directives have been rolled out. To progress in this area would need a sea change of views about 'one council, one brand' from Members and Senior Officers.

Where partnership working is in place joint branding is permitted but with prior negotiation/agreement from Corporate Communications, this includes District Councils and all other partnership ventures (e.g. Lancashire & Blackpool Tourist Board, Heritage Lottery Fund etc). And we have many examples of this within the Museums Service.

Recommendation 4

Tourism Offer

The Service acknowledges the need to attract local and non-local visitors (visitor economy). Given the recent restructure of Marketing and Communications, at the loss of a dedicated Museum Marketing team, the Service is developing links with Corporate Communications who are currently gaining a better understand of our external perspective. Corporate Communications will continue to build on firm relationships with Lancashire and Blackpool Tourist Board. We already have good evidence of Corporate Communications helping the Service optimise 'good news stories' to attract positive media attention to our sites and their 'offer'.

Recommendation 5

Increase Traded Conservation Work

The Service believes that there is a clear need to balance conservation work on LCC and partner Districts' collections and externally funded conservation work. We recognise the importance of the latter and will ensure it is a priority in the Business Plan and will revisit the target in the Business Plan. However, there is also a need to demonstrate care of LCC (and partner Districts' collections) in order to comply with Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) Museum Accreditation (the Profession's Quality Assurance Standard which is usually needed for any external funding bids).

Alongside the conservation work Lancashire Conservation Studios are seeking to develop and promote its technical services section for external clients and already has some examples of doing this which has helped to develop an excellent reputation of their expertise.

Recommendation 6

Refurbishment catering/retail

The Service recognises that we currently have differing levels of provision across the sites. We have improved our offer in this area at some of our sites but recognise that some areas/sites still need attention and that further analysis is needed on what could be delivered and improved and the investment required and ensuing economic benefits of these offers.

The Service needs to see continuous improvement to its facilities, across the board – not just in the catering and retail offers - to ensure that visitors gain an all round positive experience to encourage return visits to the site – i.e. the Museum offer as well as catering and retail offers.

We are of the opinion that any new catering/retail offer should be seen primarily as an improvement to the offer rather than, solely, as income

generation. Its addition should be at least cost neutral to the Service. The Service recognises we need to aim at a high quality offer which may be of limited range depending on the scale of operation at each site.

Most sites cannot afford the luxury of dedicated catering/retail staff. However, the Service feels that a member of staff, within Phase 2 of the Cultural Services restructure, should have dedicated responsibility for income generation of all types.

Recommendation 7

Free Admission –impact

The Service believes this is an interesting approach but would suggest trialling it as a pilot at the Museum of Lancashire rather than Judges' Lodgings Museum.

Recommendation 8

Disabled Access

The Service will review all existing DDA Audits that were undertaken across the service. After liaison with Property Group the Service will produce an action plan for any achievable progress in this area as part of Capital Programming.

Recommendation 9

BME Communities representation

The Service believes this is a long term piece of work; building relationships and developing meaningful and sustainable working methods. The Service needs to make steps out into these communities to begin engagement; to find out what we can do encourage them to visit and to feel ownership of/pride in their local museum.

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) funded temporary 2 year post of the Community Outreach Officer has been working in this area, primarily for the Museum of Lancashire redevelopment. This working process is seen as a pilot for the Service as a whole, finding a way to make and keep connections. The Service believes this temporary post is essential in the long term, to be rolled out with a Countywide remit. The Stories of the World project is another example of where the Service is looking to improve and develop its interaction/connection with BME communities.

Currently the Service does not have formal forums or consultation groups but is working on trialling this approach at Preston (Museum of Lancashire). The Service recognises that material culture from our BME communities needs to be represented in our permanent collections and efforts to encourage loans and donations are already underway through the work of the Community Outreach Officer.

Recommendation 10

Audience Research and Evaluation

Some work is already undertaken in the Service however, we are aware that this is not consistently applied or analysed. The Service needs to revisit this

area to audit current work and to ensure we make any necessary improvements to our processes, analysis and assimilation.

Non-user audience research is also invaluable in informing the Service of where we fall short in appealing to visitors. A valuable piece of work was undertaken recently in the environs of the Museum of Lancashire as part of the HLF redevelopment scheme. However there are resource implications.

The Service is currently using Standpoints at Clitheroe, Helmshore, Queen Street Mill and Rossendale. These have provided ready analysis of visitor feedback. Although this service is currently free there will be charges introduced which will be out of the range of the service.

It is suggested that a very simple evaluation form is designed and that it can then be adopted across all sites. This will give one channel of customer feedback that can be analysed by site managers and actions from the customer feedback taken to the management team so that they can be acted upon.

Recommendation 11

Ensure Maintain Skills Set for Staff

The Service recognises the need to ensure knowledge and experience of the workforce is pooled/retained for the future benefit of the Service and its users and will continue to explore all options. Currently there are three trainees working at sites in the Service funded as part of the Industrial, Maritime, Aviation and Transport Technologies (IMATT) Training Scheme and our Natural History Conservator will be taking on an apprentice in 2011. Further, the Service is working with the MLA on a funding stream to 'harvest' specialist knowledge for the service from recently retired specialist staff.

The Service needs flexibility to respond to changing circumstances without obvious restraints (e.g. for any volunteering work to be able to feed knowledge back into the Service they must be able to use LCC computers - which is currently not permitted under LCC ICT regulations).