

EXETER CITY COUNCIL
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY
9 NOVEMBER 2010

RESTRUCTURING EXETER'S MUSEUM SERVICE FOR THE FUTURE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To set out proposals for changes to museum staffing and to operational policies in preparation for the re-opening of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM), and to report on the Renaissance in the Regions programme as it affects RAMM.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Since 2003, Exeter City Council's Museum Service has received extensive funding from the national Renaissance in the Regions programme. The Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) which administered the programme has signalled that it will end in its present form on 31 March 2011, the date the current funding agreement expires. In December 2007, RAMM closed for a major refurbishment and extension project, which should have been completed during 2010, but which has been delayed for reasons Members will be familiar with. It is now due to re-open to the public towards the end of 2011, and a formal opening date of 14 December 2011 has been fixed for some time.
- 2.2 Either the end of Renaissance or the re-opening of RAMM would have necessitated major changes to staff and operational arrangements, but the fact that they now coincide in a financial year in which the City Council's resources will be under enormous strain, means that these changes must be radical and highly focused. This report attempts to set out the detailed situation in relation to both, to offer options for the Committee and Council to consider and to recommend a way forward which will maximise the benefit from the new RAMM and from the successor programmes to Renaissance.
- 2.3 The report will recommend a new staffing structure, based on the permanent staff needed to operate the new building and the service as a whole, an approach to using any transitional funding available from Renaissance in the way most serviceable to the City Council, and will recommend new opening hours, and also consider whether charging for entry might be a useful way of reducing the overall cost of the museum.
- 2.4 With other services of the Council making substantial cuts or ceasing to exist altogether, it is difficult for the museum to demonstrate savings, since it is effectively having to use a zero based budget approach, since the plant, the building and the staffing will all be new. The overall aim is to be able to set the most affordable budget possible for the museum service which also allows the new building to be as effective and high profile as possible. A notional operating budget was constructed as part of the successful Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) bid, and this has been set as the base point from which savings will be made.

3. RENAISSANCE IN THE REGIONS

- 3.1 Appendix I provides a brief history of Renaissance in the Regions, a national funding stream which has done much both to transform RAMM and many other museums at a professional level (standards of documentation and collections care for example),

but more importantly to build capacity for RAMM to provide more and better services: education, childrens' activities, outreach – and to devote additional resources to the quality of the capital project which has been its exact contemporary.

- 3.2 MLA (due to be abolished on 31 March 2012) has recently announced that it intends to re-shape Renaissance drastically, doing away with the regional hub model, and replacing it with a small number of “core museums” in major conurbations, with a parallel challenge fund for other museums to bid for. Although the current funding agreement runs out on 31 March 2011, MLA have signalled two transition years, during which current hub museums would be weaned off the present allocations; a funding reduction of 10% – 20% in 2011/12 and a further 50% in 2012/13. The conditions placed on this transitional funding appear to be, at the moment less onerous than more recent regimes, and although MLA have yet to give any details, will probably make allowance for redundancy costs.
- 3.3 At the time of writing, before the spending review announcements on 20 October, it is far from clear how MLA are able to be so certain of their ground, and indeed so generous, when other spending programmes are under severe strain, and no other decisions have been made. As it is also possible that the actual operational implications of the spending review will not be apparent by the time this Committee meets, all assertions on future external funding must be assumed to be conditional at the very least.
- 3.4 Fortunately this fits well with the strategy for future staffing and managing the development project and the normal operation which is set out in further detail below. Broadly the aim is to create a new permanent staffing structure at the minimum level required to operate the public service, with additional services provided by Renaissance staff as and when finance is available.

4. CHARGING FOR ENTRY

- 4.1 One way of reducing the net cost of the museum service is to charge for entry, either to the main museum, or for temporary exhibitions. Appendix II goes into some detail about what that might mean for RAMM.
- 4.2 While charging is well within the Council's capacity and competence, it would significantly reduce the numbers visiting the museum. Just charging visitors not resident in Exeter would be widely acceptable but would also inevitably reduce casual local visits, as some sort of filter system would be needed, requiring visitors to carry a card, or other identification with their address.
- 4.3 Appendix II sets out what income might be available and discusses the pros and cons of charging together with some options.
- 4.4 The museum already charges for educational visits of course, and it is recommended that this continue. If there is no Renaissance support for the education function however, the museum will have to charge the full cost of visits, or seek subsidy elsewhere – the County Council for example. Until the full economic cost has been calculated it is not possible to establish whether the service would be viable, but it is recommended that the service be run on a full recovery basis or not at all.

5. OPENING DAYS

- 5.1 Before its closure, RAMM opened 6 days a week, from 10am to 5pm, and was closed on Sundays. Although no guarantees were given, the Council promised that it would

consider Sunday opening once the project was complete. Funding reductions now mean that 7 day opening would not be sustainable, but that does not mean that the museum should not be open on Sundays when visitors would have more time to browse. The Council should therefore consider two options: 6 day opening, Tuesday to Sunday, or 5 day opening, Wednesday to Sunday. It is unlikely that either will offer huge energy savings over 7 day opening, but will require significantly fewer staff. In either option it will be important to ensure that terms of employment of front of house staff at least and possibly others are altered to include weekend working at standard rates. Both options will be costed in the ongoing budget preparations; no decision needs to be made until next spring.

- 5.2 Further consideration would be needed to determine whether the schools programme would be able to run on weekdays when the museum was closed to the public.

6. PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THE PROPOSED STAFFING STRUCTURE

- 6.1 More detailed staffing proposals will be put before the Executive Committee shortly, but this committee will want to see how this new structure will work and whether it will be able to deliver the Council's vision.
- 6.2 We aim firstly to re-divide the permanent core staff from project based and externally funded staff. This distinction has always been maintained in terms of contracts, but in the 7 years that Renaissance has been running, operationally there has been little difference. With RAMM re-opening however there is a need to identify the core staff who will run the building and the service. Appendix III sets out an early design of how that will be structured, and which roles it will contain.
- 6.3 Two key principles inform the structure. The first is that the main priority for next few years at least is the successful operation of the new building as a public destination. Other aspects of museum operation are equally important, but they will have to take a back seat, as the Council and the service make the most of the huge capital investment. In fact most backroom services have been well-served during Renaissance, leaving the museum in good shape as far as its collections care, record keeping, storage, general policy etc go, although it must be made clear that those functions will all gradually deteriorate again if completely ignored. However we believe that there is scope to cut back on all those activities while the attractions of the building are exploited.
- 6.4 The second is that the senior members of the new team, which is smaller than the old permanent team, will all have the task of actively seeking and then managing externally funded projects. As Appendix I suggests, there is a good chance that Renaissance will survive in the form of project funding, which will have to be bid for. All key staff will be expected to have or develop skills in making applications and in implementing short or medium term projects.
- 6.5 Work is already underway to write the new job descriptions, carry out the job evaluations and cost the structure, in time to bring a report to Executive in early December. Interviews and appointments to the new structure will take place during December so that all other staff can be given notice of the potential end of their contracts on 31 March 2011.
- 6.6 Once the core staff are appointed however, we would proceed to use the transitional Renaissance funding to appoint as many of the other staff as possible to assist principally with the preparation of RAMM for opening. These posts would taper off

with the transitional funding, but then there would be some future openings from the challenge fund, if it does happen as suggested from April 2012.

- 6.7 The core staff would be divided into three teams. The Content Management team would look after the collections, the displays and exhibitions, including RAMM's expanding web presence. Audience Development would look after marketing, design, education and crucially for the future, business development – a new role to co-ordinate the search for project funding but also to deal in general fundraising to support the core revenue budget. Finally Operational Services would include front of house and building management, conservation, technical support and volunteer co-ordination. The latter is again very important as the museum will be relying on greater numbers of volunteers in the future almost certainly.

7. FUTURE CHALLENGES

- 7.1 For some years it has been apparent that the existing policy of deposition of archaeological finds from development sites in Devon has been unsustainable as far as the museum goes. It already has a large collection of such finds, of variable importance, but all tied to planning agreements with developers. However there is a substantial backlog of material currently held by Exeter Archaeology, which it has little or no room to keep, quite apart from the fact that it is meant to be deposited. There is a moratorium on accepting any more material from any archaeological contractor at the moment, because of the pressure of the project, but by 2012 we will have to face the issue. The formal stores will be almost full by then and would in any case not be able to handle the many metres of shelving which these archives contain. It will then be time to consider the overall policy, both of maintaining the existing archive, but more importantly of accepting material from digs. Storage is expensive, although these archives do not have to be in the city centre, and could be shared with other museums.

8. CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 There is a need to restructure the staffing radically to create a core team to manage the new museum and work with the new funding regime. There is a need for the core team to have commissioning and external funding skills. Most of the team should be required to work five days out of seven.
- 8.2 It is likely that there will be transitional Renaissance funding into 2012/3, so that some additional capability can be managed.
- 8.3 RAMM should open on Sundays once it opens again. It should close on Mondays and possibly on Tuesdays.
- 8.4 The education function should be self-funding.
- 8.5 There is scope to charge for general entry, and this will be explored in more detail.
- 8.6 The Council will need to address the issues of archaeological archives in early 2012.

HEAD OF LEISURE & MUSEUMS

COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report: