

## **Officer Statement in response to Councillor Dickson's question addressed to the Chair of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Following the committee meeting on 17 November 2020, Councillor Dickson has asked for clarification in response to the following question:

"Please can you confirm that during our discussions at the meeting on June 30th about the future of Willmer House, 38 West Street, the current home of Farnham Museum, it was decided the O&S would recommend to the Executive Option 1 & 2, specifically:

**Option 1** The Council (Waverley Borough Council) pays for the repairs and continues to offer Willmer House as a Museum

**Option 2** The Council (Waverley Borough Council) pays for the repairs to Willmer House irrespective of future use"

**For clarity the Recommendations reported in the minutes of the meeting held on 30 June are as follows:**

**Action: The Committee RECOMMENDS to the Executive:**

- a) **That repairs to Willmer House be carried out**
- b) **That the consideration of the future of Farnham Museum be considered at a future date.**
- c) **To use some of the capital budget that was set aside in 2017/18 for the museum repairs to contract a specialist bid writer to produce funding applications for the conservation works.**
- d) **That O&S do not need to make a decision on the future of the building and/or museum as this is a tactical decision for Council.**

### **Statement from Officers**

Following the discussion at Community O&S on 30 June regarding the condition of Willmer House, current home to the Museum of Farnham, CH and KM started a report, which was intended for the September meeting of the Executive. The purpose of the report was to gain the Executive's approval for carrying out the building repairs in accordance with the timeline and methodology specified in the tender documents in order to avoid delaying the necessary conservation works for a further year.

However, the report was impracticable because we were unable to identify a budget of the magnitude required to carry out the works from the Council's own resources. CH and KM were advised by the Head of Finance that there was no justification for the report going further until the Council was in a more informed position to weigh up all options regarding both the property and the museum service and collection.

In a meeting which took place in October, the Portfolio Holders for Health Wellbeing and Culture and Finance, Assets and Commercial took the decision with officers to instruct Montagu Evans to carry out a Property Options Appraisal for Willmer House. CH was also asked to initiate a process for reviewing different service delivery

models for the museum and collection. This includes exploring the possibility of separating the museum from its current home as well as investigating capital funding to repair Willmer House, which would enable the museum to stay put but with a commitment to developing a re-energised community offer and role.

To this effect, officers have become aware of a fund to be announced by the government in the spring. The Museum Estate and Development Fund (MEND) is a capital programme that focuses on the strategic repair and maintenance of local and regional museums across the country. The fund will be administered by Arts Council England and will focus on capital works which support the financial and operational resilience of museums enabling them to develop a more connected and joined up role in the community they serve.

At the January Community O&S Members are invited to comment on the outline proposition for the service delivery review so that the various options can be evaluated and considered alongside the findings of the property appraisal currently being carried out by Montagu Evans.

Councillor Dickson has also raised other concerns regarding:

1. The costs of the repairs and whether there is a potential to create savings by removing the project management elements of the tendered works.
2. Why an order for the hand cut bricks was not placed in November 2020
3. What external funders had been approached by the museum working group?

These matters have been addressed by the relevant officers in separate meetings held with Councillors on 9 December and 15 January.