

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY WELLBEING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 MARCH 2021

Title:

MUSEUM OF FARNHAM SERVICE AND COLLECTION UPDATE

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Michaela Martin, Portfolio Holder for Culture, Wellbeing and Health

Head of Service: Kelvin Mills, Head of Commercial Services

Key decision: No

Access: Public

1. Purpose and summary

This report updates on the progress of matters arising from Community Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny's previous discussions with regards to Willmer House and the Museum of Farnham.

2. Recommendation

2.1 That the Committee notes the information contained in the background section of this report, which responds to queries and comments from Committee members at the Committee's meeting in January 2021.

2.2 That the Committee notes the verbal update from the Head of Finance and Property on the Property Appraisal by Montagu Evans.

2.3 That the Executive engages external professional advisers to support the Property Investment Advisory Board (PIAB) with a comprehensive appraisal of available options for the museum collection and service. This should include a detailed legal, ethical and financial analysis of these options.

3. Reason for the recommendation

3.1 **An options appraisal for the museum service and collection** would, in conjunction with the property appraisal from Montague Evans, guide and inform

decisions about the future of the building and the museum collections and service.

- 3.2 Managing a museum collection through a process of change is a complex endeavour. Without proper planning and resourcing at the outset, it has the potential to give rise to unexpected costs, delays and litigation. This is especially so given the large size of the Farnham collection, which contains over 20,000 objects.
- 3.3 The Council will need to consider:
- The implications for partnerships, staff, volunteers, visitors and local communities.
 - Adherence to the Code of Ethics for Museums.
 - That any option for items in the collection, including disposal, will give rise to costs.

4. **Background**

- 4.1 Members of the committee requested more information about **the Montague Evans Property Appraisal**. Peter Vickers, Head of Finance and Property has agreed to attend the meeting to provide this update verbally.
- 4.2 Members of the Committee commented on the value of **researching additional external funding opportunities** for the museum. A spreadsheet of grant making bodies has been updated and can be shared with Members on request.
- 4.3 The Community Development Officer has identified the Wolfson Foundation, the Pilgrims Trust and the MEND fund administered by the Arts Council as the external funding opportunities best suited to the Museum's circumstances. Contact has been made with these organisations as well as the South East Museum Development Team and Surrey Heritage. They have indicated that there is strong support for the Museum of Farnham, should the council decide to pursue this funding direction. However, they also highlighted that the process will be competitive and that there will be obstacles to overcome.
- 4.7 Councillors raised the question of **inclusive access to the museum collections on display at Willmer House**. ['Easy Access to Historic Buildings'](#) published by Historic England in 2015 summarises how the statutory framework set out in the Equality Act 2010 can be aligned with the wider principles of conservation. In essence there is a duty on service providers to make *'reasonable adjustments'* to the physical elements of a building as well as to furniture, lighting, displays etc. The Equality Act does not however override planning or listed building legislation, so changes made to improve access (e.g., installing a lift) would still require

planning permission. An application would have to demonstrate why any potentially damaging works to the building's historical or architectural significance are necessary, thereby striking a balance between conservation and access.

- 4.10 The Museum of Farnham has already taken positive steps to improve access and inclusivity wherever possible. For example, displaying principle collections on the ground floor, installing access aids, photographing and filming artefacts on the upper floors and providing audio guides. In 2015, the Museum of Farnham commissioned Teagle Access Audits to carry out a full assessment of the barriers to access. This document is scheduled for review this year but a copy of the current audit is available to councillors on request.

5. Relationship to the Corporate Strategy and Service Plan

- 5.1 This report relates to the priority of delivering high quality public services for all including sports, leisure, arts, culture and open spaces.

6. Implications of decision

6.1 Resource (Finance, procurement, staffing, IT)

Financial outlay would be required to engage consultants and staff time would be required to procure and support them. The Executive will have to consider these issues when making a decision on these recommendations.

6.2 Risk management

As discussed in 'the reasons for the recommendation' section, these recommendations will help the Council better understand mitigate potential financial risks arising from its role as the owner of the museum collection.

6.3 Legal

The 'background' section of this report sets out the legal context for access arrangements.

6.4 Equality, diversity and inclusion

The implementation of the recommendations of this report would promote consideration of equality and inclusion for people with disabilities with a Council service.

6.5 Climate emergency declaration

None

7. Consultation and engagement

- 7.1 N/A

8. Other options considered

- 8.1 It would be possible for the Council to make a decision informed primarily by the Property Appraisal. However, this would leave it informed about the options related to Willmer House as a physical asset without considering the knock-on implications for the museum collection.

9. Governance journey

- 9.1 These recommendations would next be considered by the Executive and, potentially, then by PIAB.

Background Papers

There are no background papers, as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972).

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Agreed and signed off by:
Legal Services: date
Head of Finance: date
Strategic Director: date
Portfolio Holder: date