

8. MUSEUM OPENING HOURS REVIEW

Recommendation

1. The Museums General Manager recommends that:
 - a) the production of a business case for changes to museum opening hours as set out in the report be approved; and
 - b) the presentation of a final report to a future meeting, following consultation with staff, partners and stakeholders be approved.

Background Information

2. The Joint Museums Committee received a report in September 2013 outlining consultation with the public on museum opening hours. (Minute no. 152 refers)
3. The aim of the consultation was to ensure that our opening hours are in tune with the times and days that our current and potential visitors most want to use our services, while also recognising the possibility of reductions in opening hours to meet budgetary savings targets. Reducing opening hours was approved by the joint committee in November 2012 as one strand of the 2013-16 savings package for museums.
4. Last year's review covers the Art Gallery & Museum and The Commandery. Due to the HLF funded developments at Hartlebury it was felt not appropriate to consider reviewing its opening patterns at this point. However in the intervening period a number of options for the ground floor space within the Art Gallery and Museum have been explored, one of which is the subject of a report to this meeting. As no firm decisions have been made on this or other options, the opening hours for the Foregate Street building have also been excluded temporarily until there is a clear direction.
5. This report is therefore concerned with the opening hours at the Commandery. The consultation survey results were gathered from a robust sample. A total of 808 surveys were completed, of these 27% were undertaken off-site and 10% online. 9% were aged 16 – 24, 25% were aged 65+, 10% of respondents indicated a disability and 70% of respondents were from Worcestershire.
6. A summary of the conclusions are set out below. Current patterns show people:
 - Most like to visit – Saturday afternoon, weekday

Proposals

- afternoon, Sunday afternoon
- Current visitors have a stronger preference for weekends
- Of those who have previously not visited, their preference would be weekday afternoon, Saturday afternoon, weekday morning
- Of weekdays, people least like to visit Monday
- Current visitor activity taken from 2007 – 2013 the Commandery's season appears to be April – October, with peaks at June, August and September.
- Low months are November through to February, with December and January being markedly the lowest
- Number of visitors by days April 2012 – March 2013 Highest to lowest: Saturday by far, Sunday is lowest with only 33% visitors of a Saturday.
- Hours – Most popular hours are 10 – 3, with a significant drop-off at 4pm.
- Tuesday is most popular by far for school visits.

7. The Joint Committee asked officers to review and cost proposals for a reduction in opening hours at the meeting in September.

8. Following a review it is proposed that the opening hours changes least likely to impact on the public are for the Commandery to close on Mondays and throughout the month of January. A longer period of closure during the winter months was considered but this would potentially have an impact on the Christmas season and promotions in December, as well as the Love Worcester campaign developed around February half term. It is proposed that opening on Bank Holiday Mondays be maintained as an exception to Monday closure. This new opening hours pattern would represent common practice at other museums and heritage sites.

9. These proposals will require changes to staff hours and deployment. Given the range of consultants' reports and in-house now in place identifying improvements to interpretation, visitor experience and marketing of the Commandery, it is also proposed that job roles be reviewed to ensure the best possible service to the public is maintained and enhanced from Tuesday to Sunday when most people want to visit.

10. Initial estimates of the savings (subject to grading) are £12-14K, assuming all income from the closed periods is lost and not displaced. Extra marketing resources would be required initially to inform visitors of the changes and to encourage visits on other days of the week. It is intended that opening hours will be reviewed again once new interpretation and an improved visitor experience is in place in 2-3 years.

11. The Joint Committee is asked to authorise the

production of a business case for consultation with staff. Final proposals will then be presented to the committee in September.

12. Partners have not yet been consulted on any possible changes but a period of consultation will follow this Joint Committee if members decide to proceed with the proposals.

Contact Points

Specific Contact Point for this report:

Iain Rutherford, Museums General Manager
(01905) 361827/361821

Email: IRutherford@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

In the opinion of the Museums General Manager the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- Museums Worcestershire Venue Opening Hours Survey June 2013
- Museums shared service partnership agreement 2010