

CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 1 NOVEMBER 2022

UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL'S STRATEGY FOR MUSEUMS, ARTS AND CULTURE

Summary

1. The Panel has requested an update on Worcestershire County Council's Strategy for Museums, Arts and Culture as part of its Work Programme.
2. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities, the Assistant Director of Communities and the relevant service managers have been invited to the meeting to update the Panel on developments relating to museums, arts and culture.

Background

3. Worcestershire County Council (the Council) recognises the importance of arts, culture, and heritage in making Worcestershire a great place to live, work and visit. Arts, culture, and heritage activity is an important avenue to improve wellbeing through connecting with others, increasing self-awareness, reminiscing, and accessing new experiences. Whilst the Council, has no overarching Museum, Arts and Cultural strategy, it does deliver and provide access to a wider range of opportunities. This report provides an overview of these services.

Museums Worcestershire including the County Museum

4. Worcestershire County Museum is based at Hartlebury Castle, and the site is run as a significant visitor attraction for Worcestershire in partnership with the independent charity Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust. The displays include the stories of Worcestershire's heritage, which includes an internationally important collection of Gypsy caravans.
5. The County Museum has a particular expertise in using artefacts and stories from Worcestershire's history to improve wellbeing both for general social visitors and with specific groups. Recent projects have included:
 - **Lavish Living Gallery at the County Museum**, which highlights the history of 1950s in Worcestershire, prompting inter-generational reminiscence by visitors.
 - **Suitcase Stories** outreach project, using museum artefacts to encourage conversations with those living with dementia and their carers, improving communication outcomes. The most recent phase brought schools and care homes together virtually during Covid lockdowns. The three phases have

brought in £200k of funding, reached over 1000 participants and worked with 36 artists. Our results have been shared with over 300,000 supporters and fellow professionals online.

- **No One Left Behind** support project, funded by Historic England and run jointly with Worcestershire Archives staff. This supported the independent and volunteer run heritage sector in Worcestershire throughout the pandemic with mentoring, tailored advice and toolkits to support their continued operations, volunteer recruitment and fundraising.
- **Volunteers at Home**, which harnessed the digital innovations during Covid to train and support volunteers who were not able to come onto museum premises to still take part in volunteering activities. Participants' wellbeing increased significantly by being part of this programme. The framework was shared nationally at the Museums Association conference and has been adopted by other heritage organisations.
- **Museums Worcestershire's education programmes** reached 14,000 children and adults in 2021-22. At the County Museum multi-curriculum sessions work with home educated students and their parents, with looked-after children and their carers, with both Afghan and Ukrainian refugee families, and focuses particularly on achievements with KS2 school students.

6. Worcestershire County Museum is run as part of a joint service, Museums Worcestershire, with Worcester City Council, sharing expertise to enable continued development and bring in external funding in the most cost-effective way. The service is overseen by a Joint Museums Committee and annual performance and progress is set out in a public annual report (a copy of the annual report can be found in the supporting information as Appendix 1).
7. In 2019, the Joint Museums Committee adopted a five-year strategic plan for the service. (The full version of this can be found in the supporting information as Appendix 2). The five priorities for the service are:
 - **Develop the venues and collections for the future:** work with visitors, stakeholders, funders and partners to grow an ambitious and sustainable service.
 - **Strengthen the core:** develop display and learning programmes and projects that identify, focus and promote the best of the collections, buildings and our expertise.
 - **Learn from our audience and improve:** respond to feedback and data to broaden our engagement and prioritise annual work programmes.
 - **Make a difference in our communities:** creatively use museums' unique assets to increase our users' wellbeing and contribute to the economic development of the city and county.

Grow and diversify our funding and resilience: maximise the potential of our resources to develop new, and further strengthen existing sources of revenue.
8. Museums Worcestershire's Strategic Plan particularly noted the upcoming ending of the leases at Hartlebury Castle and the Collections Centre storage unit. Planning work is being undertaken on options for property, future business models and partnerships which will be brought to the Joint Museums Committee and then to Cabinet in 2023.

Libraries, Archives and Archaeology

9. Following the Covid pandemic, the Archive & Archaeology service has re-started its community outreach and learning programme and made further progress on improving online access to the county's archive collection. Recent highlights include the Roots in Time archaeology project, funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund and Arts Council, which has delivered a community excavation and other outreach events at the Council's tree planting site at Norton; and the launch in July 2022 of nearly 3 million Worcestershire archives records on the Ancestry website, allowing people to research their family history online.
10. A draft Archive & Archaeology Strategy has been prepared, drawing on recommendations from an internal Needs Assessment and an external Service Review to define a medium-term vision for this area of the Council's heritage services. The strategy identifies five priorities.
 - **A Heritage Hub for Worcestershire:** to engage & collaborate with heritage partners countywide to establish a Heritage Hub for Worcestershire
 - **Heritage for all:** to grow the audience and reach of archive & archaeology services to increase service participation, improve representation and build a stronger sense of place across Worcestershire
 - **Educating, connecting and enriching Worcestershire Communities:** to develop new services that provide opportunities for residents of all ages to learn, develop new skills, connect with others and grow their understanding of family and local heritage
 - **Preserving, Protecting and Enhancing Worcestershire's Environment:** to develop new services and ways of working that deliver the Council's corporate environmental priorities
 - **Sustaining Heritage Services for Worcestershire:** to secure new sources of commercial income and to streamline service structures and delivery models to future-proof Worcestershire's heritage services.
11. Implementation of the Archive & Archaeology Strategy will see The Hive established as a heritage asset for Worcestershire, showcasing the county's heritage offer; the archive & archaeology service offer more demonstrably aligned to Council and community priorities; and a more stable and sustainable budget with flexibility to respond to continuing financial pressure. Work is currently underway to develop a business case for further commercial income generation in the combined service.
12. A Cultural Programme has been launched at The Hive in October 2022 to engage a wide and diverse audience, showcase the unique partnership between the University and the Council and develop The Hive further as a cultural venue. The programme is built around quarterly themes, the first of which; 'Migrating Communities', celebrates the cultural contribution that communities relocating to Worcestershire have brought to the county. It launched with a talk from award winning author Kit de Waal, which attracted an audience of over 100 and will end with a Rap Battle poetry event. Future themes include 'Sustainability and the Environment' which will present artwork displayed in The Hive's flood basin and 'Wellbeing' which will incorporate loneliness and isolation poetry workshops.

Worcestershire County Council Arts Development Programme

13. Severn Arts is commissioned to deliver arts development activity on behalf of the Council. They are funded to produce an annual plan, which has set targets to align with the Council's corporate plan and which are evaluated and monitored by the Communities team. They work with a range of target groups across education settings, local communities, vulnerable adults, and support emerging artists and the creative sector to access funds, produce work and take part in training and development.
14. Severn Arts has expanded its team over the past 3 years to include marketing and social media expertise; outreach experts and project managers who are responsible for delivery of large projects such as Young Poet Laureate and Young Voices, New Visions. These key staff have added to the overall capacity to offer high quality, engaging and in some cases, life-changing arts activity for the people of Worcestershire.
15. In addition, they have worked in partnership with many organisations to support the sector and to bring new experiences into Worcester City specifically, through [The Arches-Worcester](#) project and the delivery of new festivals. They also work side-by-side with schools in the County as we are the lead organisation for Worcestershire's [Music Education Hub](#), funded through the DfE.
16. Here are some highlights of Severn Art's achievements:
 - **Project Management and deliver of The Arches Worcester Project**
 - A partner in the £4.5m funded project taking place in the city over 4 years
 - Lead on the Festivals Strand including delivering 7 festivals to over 133,000 people.
 - **Adviser and support for Reimagine Redditch,**
 - Arts Council Funded Creative People and Places Project in Redditch bringing in £1m over 3 years to work with people not currently engaged in the arts.
 - **Commissioner and supporter of artists**
 - Supported over 50 artists to develop new work, especially as part of the Covid recovery.
 - **Delivery of core programmes aimed at vulnerable and disadvantaged groups**
 - Worked with over 4000 children and young people as part of the Holiday, Activity and Food Programme, providing 215 employment opportunities for artists.
 - **Delivered key high-profile projects for Worcestershire County Council**
 - Supported the Young Poet Laureate to further her talent by providing local opportunities to perform, write and input into initiatives in Bromsgrove and libraries
 - 100 schools have taken part in Young Voices New Vision Arts Exhibition at Worcester Cathedral
 - Commissioned 5 artists to create banners celebrating the Queen's Jubilee which were used across the County at community events

- Worked with 8 schools to create a new Jubilee Song and artwork which was sung and displayed at The Big Sing with 1000 children and young people taking part.
- **Supported delivery of work in rural communities**
 - Part of the rural touring scheme collaborating with local communities to provide live performances in village settings
 - Over 100 performances have taken place with audiences of over 5000.
- **Ensured communication with the sector and identified new partnerships**
 - Send out a monthly Newsletter to the creative and cultural sector with news and opportunities in Worcestershire and further afield
 - Represent the County on regional and national networks such as Culture Central, West Midlands Cultural Compact Plus, Without Walls consortium of Festivals and others.
 - Become part of major initiatives such as Black Lives Matter, More than a Moment and others.

Further collaboration

17. Following attendance at a recent Local Government Association leadership for Libraries & Culture, a proposal is being discussed to create an over-arching strategy across the Council's cultural and heritage services incorporating libraries, museums, arts, archives and archaeology. This reflects a trend in other authorities and would seek to identify shared services goals and promote greater collaboration across services with a view to:

- working more effectively and collaboratively with key internal and external partners to identify higher impact, wider reaching cultural projects and to optimise funding
- leveraging skills across the Council's cultural and heritage services and building capacity
- reaching larger audiences
- engaging more widely with residents and communities to better understand their cultural requirements and to promote innovation in cultural projects.

18. Further collaboration across internal and external arts, cultural and heritage services would maximise opportunities for people to engage in creative activity that; offers joy, hope and entertainment for those in need; supports creative education that addresses issues such as emotional health, confidence, and well-being. All of which contributes to Worcestershire's economy, well-being, and prosperity.

Purpose of the Meeting

19. The Panel is asked to:

- consider and comment on the contents of the report, including the supporting information, and
- determine whether any further information or scrutiny on a particular topic is required.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Web Link to [Museums Worcestershire Annual Report 2021-22](#)

Appendix 2 – Web Link to [Museums Worcestershire Strategic Plan 2019-2024](#)

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer, (in this case the Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)