

Report to: Joint Museums Committee, 26th October 2023

Report of: Museums Manager

Subject: MUSEUMS 2024-25 FEES AND CHARGES

1. Recommendation

1.1 That the Joint Museums Committee approves the proposed package of changes to the Museums' fees and charges and recommends their inclusion in the wider Worcester City Council and Worcestershire County Council fee setting process.

1.1 That the Joint Museums Committee approves the temporary alteration from 1/1/2024 of any fees to be included in annual calendar-year publicity.

2. Background

2.1 In 2010, as part of the Joint Museums Agreement, the two partner authorities agreed the following approach for setting of fees and charges for museums:

- Inflationary rises in fees & charges be delegated to the Museums Manager as part of the annual service planning.
- Alterations, temporary charges and wider changes to fees as part of business planning should be agreed by the Joint Museums Committee.
- The introduction of any new fees or charges should be taken by the relevant authority to Cabinet (Worcestershire County Council) or the appropriate Committee (at Worcester City Council) on recommendation from the Joint Museums Committee.

2.2 Museums Worcestershire brings proposed changes to the Joint Museums Committee at this time each year for discussion, following which they can be included in both partner authority approval processes in November.

3. Preferred Option

3.1 The attached appendix sets out the proposed fees for 2024-25. Fees charges in the last two years are included as a reference point.

3.2 The charges proposed this year are predominantly an inflationary increase. In previous years an average between the retail price index and the consumer prices index at time of report writing has been used as the inflationary figure. This year that inflation average would be 7.7%. We have this year worked to a 6% average but rounding up to a simple figure.

Last year the standard inflation average would have been 11.2% (and the actual cost of maintaining the service was calculated at 9.37%).

To lower the impact on visitors a lower average of 5% was used, so museum charges are now lower in real terms than they were two years ago.

- 3.3 As in previous years, following advice from our commissioned retail consultant, we have rounded proposed new admission charges to the nearest psychological price point, a strategy common amongst successful visitor attractions.
- 3.4 In 2019, the Joint Committee approved a proposal to align archaeology deposit fees with the national average, but over a period so that archaeology units could incorporate this change within their planning. These fees therefore continue to rise above inflation, on schedule to align with national averages in 3 years' time.
- 3.5 The approval of admissions charges to Hartlebury Castle (shared with Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust) is currently delegated to the County Council's Assistant Director (Communities) in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of this committee, in order to support HCPT's need to make faster and more reactive decisions to grow their business plan. These will be agreed by the two partners by the end of the year.
- 3.6 We have included the proposal for fees to use new spaces in wedding celebrations at The Commandery. The team's experience in managing weddings has highlighted these opportunities and the Solar has been newly added to the wedding licence.
- 3.7 For several years, Museums Worcestershire has supported smaller museums in the county and region by occasionally offering versions of some of Worcester's exhibitions for display. This has been funded using external grants or by making a consultancy charge. We now have a small number of exhibitions available to tour across the country and so a new charge has been added to enable this new business strand to be piloted.
- 3.8 These new charges are highlighted in blue in the appendix and will be recommended for adoption as part of the wider City Council fee setting process.
- 3.9 While fees & charges are considered by the two authorities on a financial year basis, the majority of publicity for museums is produced annually for a calendar year. It is proposed that 2024 publicity should include any increased prices, rather than delaying changes.

4. Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 Benchmarking for charges has been undertaken this year, comparing our current fees against similar activities within the region and this has resulted in a small number of charges not rising with inflation. Regular benchmarking ensures that Museums Worcestershire fees are comparative to other similar attractions, neither pricing our activities beyond the market nor undermining other services.
- 4.2 Not raising charges is an option. This would have a significant impact on the overall budget for the service and would require an equivalent reduction of service.

5. Implications

- 5.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications
Income from fees and charges now makes up about a fifth of Museums Worcestershire's planned annual budget.

The level at which these are set impacts upon the ability to meet the annual work plan for the service. If the income rises less than the corresponding costs, that reduction in income needs either to be found in savings or in an increased contribution from each partner authority (or both).

5.2 Legal and Governance Implications

There are no legal and governance implications to this report.

5.3 Risk Implications

There is an inherent risk in meeting fee targets when working in a commercial environment. This is managed by careful monitoring of performance and, if necessary, associated expenditure. Fees do sometimes need to come down if monitoring shows they have risen above the market. Careful monitoring is undertaken throughout the year.

5.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

There are no corporate policy implications to this report.

5.5 Equality Implications

The changes proposed in this report have been reviewed for equality implications and it has been concluded these are minimal as most public charge increases are in line with inflation.

5.6 Human Resources Implications

There are no human resources implications to this report.

5.7 Health and Safety Implications

There are no H&S implications to this report.

5.8 Social, Environmental and Economic Implications

The changes proposed in this report have been reviewed for social, environmental or economic implications and it has been concluded there is no significant impact.

Ward(s):

All wards

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Background Papers:

Appendix: Proposed Museums Fees & Charges 24-25