

Report to: Joint Museums Committee, 26th October 2023

Report of: Museums Manager

Subject: WORCESTER CITY MUSEUMS REVIEW

1. Recommendation

- 1.1 That the Joint Committee note the review of visitor patterns relating to the two Worcester City Council museums and the proposal of revised public opening hours for both museums,**
- 1.2 That the Joint Committee approve the proposed changes to the staffing at both museums; and**
- 1.3 The Museums Manager be authorised to implement the proposed staffing changes, following Worcester City Council procedures in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of this committee.**

2. Background

- 2.1 The Commandery and Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum both play an important role attracting visitors into Worcester. The spend by Museums Worcestershire’s visitors in other local businesses was £2.4million in 2022-23.
- 2.2 The profile of the city museum visitors has shifted over the last 15 years from predominately local visitors to a more equal mix of Worcester residents and those on trips into the city. On average, 60% of museum visitors now come from across Worcestershire, about 25% from the West Midlands region and up to 15% from across the country. The museum service keeps the profile of its audience under regular review and the service aims to respond to demand and need from its users.
- 2.3 The current opening hours of the two city museums have remained the same for more than 15 years. During this period the offer at each museum has changed, as have visitor patterns both in the museums themselves and in the city centre. Opening hours were last formally reviewed in 2018, at which point evidence of need for change was recognised, but not at sufficient enough levels to make a change.

| The Commandery current opening hours | |
|---|---|
| Seasonality | February-December |
| Current opening hours | Tues-Sat 10am-5pm; Sun 11am-3pm plus Bank Holiday Mondays |
| Total open hours to public | 39 hours per week |

| Worcester Art Gallery & Museum current opening hours | |
|---|------------------------|
| Seasonality | All year |
| Current opening hours | Mon-Sat 10.30am-4.30pm |

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------------|
| Total open hours to public | 36 hours per week |
|----------------------------|-------------------|

- 2.4 Worcester City Council has an overview of cultural activity in the city through its Tourism Strategy and its Arts and Cultural Strategy. Both focus on cultivating networks and opportunities in the city in order to more widely raise the profile of Worcester. The city museums play a key part in these strategies and the City Council needs their visitor offer to have a simple message that is straightforward to promote, is the optimum offer to attract tourist visits (predominately weekend visits) into Worcester and supports growth in footfall to other city businesses.
- 2.5 Under the Museums Shared Services Partnership agreement, the function of managing the operation of an effective museum service, along with final approval for any staff change is delegated to the Joint Museums Committee. Any permanent change to the opening hours of any museum, however, is excluded from this committee's delegated responsibilities and, at the City Council, sits with the Place and Economic Development Committee.
- 2.6 Worcester City Council's medium term financial plan includes a need for a significant savings to balance the council's budget. Ongoing work has been undertaken by all city services to lower the projected budget gap in future years. The city museums have taken on an additional £17k in income targets in 23-24, and any service review needs to include additional budget saving.

3. Information

- 3.1 In 2022-23, including through the blockbuster Canaletto exhibition, the city museums reviewed the pattern of museum visiting, city centre footfall and local business hours to monitor if current museum opening hours are still aligned to visitor need. The findings of this review can be summarised:

| Seasonality | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Commandery | Least busy December, March, June February 17% of total for year |
| Art Gallery & Museum | Least busy to exhibitions December, January But shop income highest December |
| Days of the week | |
| Commandery | Busiest mid-week and Saturdays Sundays least busy day Fridays most popular with schools Café busiest Saturdays and Sundays |
| Art Gallery & Museum | Busiest Saturdays All other days almost equal Canaletto busiest Saturday then Wednesday and Friday, least busy Monday Visitor comments mention Sunday closure |
| City centre footfall | Fridays and Saturdays busiest All other days (incl Sunday) almost equal Public transport in and out of city centre on Sundays is poor |
| Other businesses | Hive: least busy days are Sunday and Monday North end of Worcester businesses are least likely to be open on Mondays |
| Hours | |
| Commandery | 31% visitors arrive first hour on Sundays Only 2% visitors arrive in last hour, except Sundays when it's 13% |
| Art Gallery & Museum | 30% visitors arrive in first hour |

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| | 6% in last hour |
| City centre footfall | Busiest hours weekdays 12-2; Saturdays 10-5; Sundays 12-3 Footfall drops by 22% after 4pm across week Drops very significantly by 6pm (even on Fri and Sat) |

- 3.2 The conclusions from this review were:
- increased seasonal closure would be possible but would have a negative impact on museum income,
 - there is potential for Sunday opening and Monday closure at the Art Gallery & Museum to be successful – this being a very common opening pattern for other museums globally and thus familiar for visitors. This change would also benefit businesses at the North end of the city centre,
 - Visitor demand is to open and close slightly earlier in the day,
 - Visitor patterns suggest opening slightly longer on Sundays at The Commandery would increase visitors.

- 3.3 The criteria used for planning the changes to the museum public hours and the necessary changes to staffing are:
- Continue to deliver a successful visitor experience, increasing visitor numbers and supporting Worcester City Council’s strategies,
 - Maximise the opportunities for earned income,
 - Operate the museum to standards required by Museum Accreditation and, at the Art Gallery Government Indemnity standards for national loans to exhibitions,
 - Ensure the safe and efficient operation of the museum, including safe evacuation of visitors in the event of a fire or other emergency,
 - Sunday working paid at an enhanced rate as per Worcester City Council’s local conditions
 - Changes to rotas distribute hours fairly between different staff undertaking the same role. Where possible negative impacts are planned to minimise the impact on any single staff member.

4. Preferred Option

- 4.1 A revision of opening hours is proposed, better reflecting current visitor demand and the opportunity for growth in tourism, particularly at weekends. The proposal is to have the same hours at both museums, simplifying the message. The proposed revised hours are:

| The Commandery and Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| Proposed opening hours | Tues-Sat 10am-4pm; Sun 10am-3pm |
| Total open hours to public | 35 hours per week |

- 4.2 To operate the museums to these revised hours, changes to the front-line teams at both The Commandery and the Art Gallery & Museum will be required. The proposed staff changes are included in the exempt appendix as it includes information relating to individuals.
- 4.3 The implementation of this option will make the £5000 savings set out in the finance report presented at this meeting, along with an additional £1000 saving to the MAG offices budget which is not within the Joint Museum service’s budget.

These savings contribute to the requirements of Worcester City Council's medium term financial plan.

5. Alternative Options Considered

- 5.1 The alternative would be to not make the revision and continue with the current visitor hours at both city museums. Opening hours would continue to be misaligned to visiting patterns and would not support tourist weekend visits as well. The required saving would instead need to be made through a reduction in the service at the City Museums, with a less ambitious programme of exhibition and events at the two sites.

6. Implications

- 6.1 **Financial and Budgetary Implications**
This proposal meets the budget saving required by the city for its museums. Because the proposed changes are in line with service usage, it is not anticipated that earned income will reduce, although this will remain under review.
- 6.2 **Legal and Governance Implications**
There are no legal or governance implications to the proposed work.
- 6.3 **Risk Implications**
As earned income is now a significant percentage of the museums' budget, there is always a risk that changes to operations may impact income earning and required additional changes. This risk will be kept closely under review.
- 6.4 **Corporate/Policy Implications**
The Place and Economic Development Committee will consider the wider city policy impact of this proposal for change.
- 6.5 **Equality Implications**
The business case has been reviewed, concluding that there are no equality implications to this work.
- 6.6 **Human Resources Implications**
Worcester City HR team have been involved in the preparation work towards the proposal for change.
- 6.7 **Health and Safety Implications**
H&S impact has formed part of the review process and it is believed there are no implications of the proposed operational change.
- 6.8 **Social, Environmental and Economic Implications**
Aligning the visitor offer at the city museums is anticipated to have a positive impact on social and economic implications by increasing tourist visits and family access to the museums.

Ward(s): All wards
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Supporting Papers: Appendix (exempt)