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Agenda item: 8

Title of meeting: Cabinet Member for Culture Leisure and Sport
Subject: Impact of Dickens Community Archive Project
Date of meeting: 8 February 2013
Report by: Head of City Development and Cultural Services
Wards affected: All

1. Requested by

1.1 Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport

2. Purpose of the Report

2.1 To inform of the success and the impact of the Dickens Community Archive Project. To explain the important role of community groups in developing this project, supporting the successful delivery of a wide range of outcomes and their value in informing and participating in museum and archive activities.

3. Information requested:

3.1 Project Description

3.1.1 A Tale of One City, a two year project based at Portsmouth City Museum and run by Portsmouth Museums, Archives and Visitor Services (PMAVS), celebrated the 200th anniversary of Charles Dickens' birth by encouraging local people to share their own history and engage with the city's archive collection.

3.1.2 The majority of the funding for the project was provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), with additional funding from Hampshire Archives Trust (HAT), Portsmouth Museum and Records Society and the Museums (PMRS), Archives and Libraries Council (MLA – now defunct).

3.1.3 Projects have been showcased via an exhibition at the City Museum and our community archive website www.ATaleofOneCity.portsmouth.gov.uk.

3.1.4 The project officer met with over 30 community groups and worked with participants on an ongoing basis to create a broad array of 12 seed (or

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‘taster’) projects and 6 exhibition projects tailored to each group’s specific interests.

- 3.1.5 Participating groups were the African Women’s Forum, Alderman Lacey Library reminiscence group, Buckland Play Centre, Charles Dickens School and Charles Dickens School family learners, Fratton Bunny Warren Pre-school, Fratton Live At Home, Fratton Community Centre, Landport Community Centre Play scheme and craft club, Ogroshor Bengali Women’s Group, Paulsgrove Monday Club, Portsea Wednesday and Friday Clubs, Southsea Friends and Welcome Club. Most of the participants were first time archive users and some from ‘harder to reach’ audiences.

The project worked with pre-existing community groups, some supported by colleagues from PCC for example the Health Improvement and Development Service (HIDS).

3.2 Project Outcomes

3.2.1 Creative work

A strong body of creative work – photographic, digital and made items – was produced by the groups, and there was considerable pride in seeing this work embedded in Museum displays, showcased at other venues and published on the website.

Creative outcomes were diverse and include films, embroidery, a magazine, exhibition panels, photographs, costumes, a snakes and ladders board game based on real life court cases from the past and kites decorated on an archival theme by pre-school children.

Some seed projects celebrated the history of particular areas of Portsmouth such as Portsea, Paulsgrove and Copnor.

Participating groups created high quality, lasting outputs from their projects which have been distributed or shown to a wider audience.

3.2.2 Engagement with new audiences

There was close engagement and high levels of enjoyment among project participants, most of whom had never had any contact with the City’s archives and records before, and many of whom had never visited the City Museum. Many participants took family and friends to visit the City Museum to see their work.

The project demonstrated the capacity of our collections to engage and inspire people in ways they had not expected.

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The City Museum welcomed 40,382 visitors during the A Tale of One City exhibition. The community elements of the exhibition such as the trail of knitted mice were popular with visitors. 12,663 people visited the Dickens Birthplace Museum in 2012 taking advantage of the extended opening hours in the anniversary year.

3.2.3 Learning and skills development

Thirty six people from across PCC and our community partners have taken part in the archive training course.

In addition participating groups visited Portsmouth History Centre, with the project covering the costs of transportation, offering an opportunity to discover the city's archives, often for the first time.

Community partners have also gained skills in oral history and been motivated to tell their own stories and ensure that these are recorded as part of the City's heritage.

Participants have been enabled to use the archive to research their own areas of interest and gained a better understanding of handling and using material from the archive collection.

A number of participants explained that the project developed their personal self confidence, while others describe undertaking further research as a consequence of being involved in the project.

3.2.4 Improving social interaction

The project provided a social space, bringing together people who had never met before, and encouraged communication between different generations.

3.2.5 Sense of place

The project also led participants to share their pride in the City, their sense of belonging, and a desire to find out more about Portsmouth's history.

3.2.6 Collaborative working

Collaborative and positive relationships were developed and built upon between PMAVS and local communities. The project also worked across PCC departments including with HIDs and Adult and Community Learning.

3.2.7 Volunteer engagement

A total of 76 volunteer days have been contributed by volunteers working on the exhibition, moderating the project website and as volunteer guides at the

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Dickens Birthplace Museum. This builds on the extensive volunteering programme already in place within PMAVS.

In addition, a total of 2568 'volunteer hours' have been spent by participants working on the project.

3.2.8 Website

The project website www.ATaleofOneCity.portsmouth.gov.uk , launched in early 2012, was visited 39,631 times in the period from 19 March to 31 December. This figure exceeded our visitor target for the whole of 2012 in just over 9 months.

3.2.9 Publicity

PMAVS communicated with people across Portsmouth via six editions of our project newsletter A Tale of One City News made available in printed copies at museums, libraries and community centres and on the web.

The project has received coverage in local and national media, appeared as a case study on the Museum Association's Museum Practice website and our A Tale of One City site featured in BBC 'Who Do you Think you Are?' magazine. The project was short-listed for a National Lottery Award.

3.2.10 Conservation of collections

Conservation work has been carried out on a total of 91 items, comprising 59 items from the archive collection, 22 items from the museum collections, including 9 original manuscript letters by Charles Dickens, and 10 items from the Library Collections. The material conserved has been used by our community groups for research and learning and featured in our A Tale of One City exhibition.

3.2.11 Celebration events

Certificates are being presented to all participants in a series of small ceremonies held at community venues

4 Legacy

- 4.1 The foundations laid by the project are shaping how museums work with the community in future. For example, one of the groups involved in A Tale of One City is contributing to the Teddy Bears exhibition opening in 2013. We plan to use the 100 year anniversary of the start of the First World War as a further opportunity to involve the wider community. We see community participation as key to the future success and sustainability of PMAVS.

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The website will continue into 2013 and beyond as a place for users to interact with our archive collection and add photographs and information of their own.

The Archive Interest Group has formed from our project participants. This group now meet on a bi-monthly basis to learn more about different aspects of the archive collection and find ways to use the collection more widely.

The conservation work undertaken on the collections ensures that these items will be accessible to the public in years to come.

5. Evaluation

- 5.1 PMAVS have appointed an external evaluator who will be reporting to us in February 2013. The methodology she has employed includes depth interviews with project group leaders, Board members and internal stakeholders; focus group discussions with participants; discussions with volunteers; and profiling of visitors to the City Museum.

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 Signed by
Stephen Baily
Head of City Development and Cultural Services

Background List of Documents:

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
None	