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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, CULTURE AND LEISURE SCRUTINY PANEL

MINUTES of the meeting of the Economic Development, Culture and Leisure Scrutiny Panel held on Monday, 8 January 2024 at 10.00 am at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Russell Simpson (in the Chair)

Councillors John Smith
Yinka Adeniran
Peter Candlish
Leo Madden
George Madgwick

ALSO PRESENT

Stephanie Parker - Economic Growth Skills & Employment Officer
Rebecca Alexander - Places and Markets Manager
Jane Lamer - Head of Economic Development and Skills
James Daly - Culture Developments and Project Officer
Claire Watkins - Business Manager, Culture and Leisure
Allison Harper - Democratic Services

20. Apologies for absence (AI 1)

There were no apologies.

21. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

22. Minutes of Previous Meeting 29 November 2023 (AI 3)

The minutes of 29 November 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

23. Minutes of Previous Meeting 14 December 2023 (AI 4)

The minutes of the meeting of 14 December were approved as an accurate record.

24. Scrutiny Review of the Economic Development & Regeneration Strategy focusing on High Street Direction (AI 5)

Witnesses

Christine Taylor - Curator of Natural History, Cumberland Museum
Grace Scott - Museums Engagement Officer
Ross Fairbrother - General Manager of the D-Day Story
Cathy Hakes - Head of Museums Service
Dave Percival - Libraries and Archive Services Manager
Catherine Ramsay - Business Development and Projects Manager

The Chair advised that this meeting would be focusing on cultural engagement within the context of the High Street.

Cathy Hakes - Head of Service, Museums

Cathy told the panel the Museums Service was keen to bring the heritage out into the different areas of the city. She advised that the current big project was the D-Day 80th anniversary programme for 2024. The plan is to place small pop-ups from the museums into the city libraries with the first going in in a few weeks' time in Cosham library. The service is actively fundraising and raising sponsorship and as the programme moves around the city, they are looking at different ways to engage local people with the museum service. The Museum Service had received £21,000 sponsorship money to fund educational visits for school children to the D-Day Story. The link up will start in the north of the city where the pop-up museums will commence. The service will be working with Cultural Development to potentially place some pop-ups in the city centre.

Cathy advised that the constraints they have are in funding the displays. They are considering other libraries such as Paulsgrove and North End. There is an issue of resources as they, along with the library, need to build and create displays that attracts enough interest to foster engagement from local people.

To better advertise the pop-ups, creative window displays in empty shops would be beneficial, and also out on the street, carrying out live re-enactments to engage people.

Cathy advised it would all be ready to launch by the end of January.

Christine Taylor, Curator of Natural History, Cumberland Museum

Christine gave details on the project in Cascades Shopping Centre during the Covid lockdown. It was set up with the idea of engaging people while the museums were closed and was initially going to be in place for a few weeks but ended up being in place for over a year.

The project involved putting historical objects in an empty unit in Cascades as Cascades was one of the few places open during lockdown. 60,000 people came by and viewed the exhibition. There were QR codes in place between August 2020 and April 2021 and over 700 activity sheets were distributed. The windows required regular cleaning due to the amount of people looking through the windows and this window cleaning gave an opportunity to engage with people who were curious about the displays. Christine advised that other locations were also considered but Cascades was a prime high street location that was being frequented at the time.

Christine advised that, anecdotally, people came to specifically visit the display which had been designed to look very attractive and exploratory. Positive feedback was given on the display. Christine advised there was a webcam counting people and the count on the security cameras of people who stopped in front of the display was over 56,000 by February 2021. A

66% uplift was achieved on visitors to the website due to the use of the QR codes.

Christine advised that Cascades was more of an installation rather than a pop-up. The overall cost was just over £7,000 mainly from the High Street Fund. Most of the objects came from a collection which has a trust fund so there was no cost in that respect. It took about 3 months to set it up as they were hampered by the restrictions on the amount of people in a room at a time.

Christine noted that what would be useful would be things that are more for pop-ups when attending displays or exhibitions. She agreed with the panel that it would be useful to have key items that could be stored as a communal resource and reused for multiple people to access when needed, such as display units, pop-up banners, AV equipment, and screens that could be reused and repurposed.

Jane Lamer advised that there are some resources available, held by culture, that are shared for different types of displays. Efficiencies are made but there is a fairly limited resource for pop-ups.

Grace Scott - Museums Engagement Officer

Grace explained to the panel that natural history collections, compared to other museum objects, have additional needs that are more organic and may need a case that can start at about £5,000. It is an expensive investment, but it would pay off in the long term as it can be reused for any object afterwards. She noted the amazing installation in Cascades and the positive impact it had on the high street and the Cascades Shopping mall.

Grace told the panel that the service also does in person events, such as people from the Young Creatives dressing up as silver street performing statues promoting the Silver City exhibition at the Cosham Christmas lights switch on and the Hot Walls Christmas market. They also took part in the Red Bull theatre at the We Shine festival which encouraged in person physical engagement. These were funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and bring a vibrancy to an area. The D-Day Story pop-up is more of a digital interaction with TV screen, big graphics, and vinyl archive images. For the Cosham pop-up, the museum has researched people or soldiers from Cosham, so it is unique to the area. The displays can then be reused for the next theme or exhibition.

In response to a panel question, Jane Lamer advised that there are storage places across the city in different locations. External funding is always sought if possible but internally capital spend could be used but there are a lot of demands on that fund. Although different directorates have items to use there is not a centralised list.

The Panel noted that having items in one central place for reuse can save money and is a cheap way of doing pop-up shops. PCC has the infrastructure to be able to do this very easily.

Ross Fairbrother - General Manager of the D-Day Story

The Chair advised that an email statement had been provided by Katherine Webber, D-Day Story, which had been circulated to the panel.

Ross observed that pop-up museums present a real opportunity to engage with people who normally may not come to museums across the city, or who think that museums are not for them.

Ross told the panel that the D-Day Story was extensively redeveloped a number of years ago and that it is a modern, contemporary museum. It had been developed to ensure content is accessible for a more general audience. Pop-ups present an opportunity to engage more people in a way that you might not do in a museum space. They also present an opportunity to make it more personal such as in Cosham with stories of local people. This can create a real pride of place. The museum often goes out with a pop-up stand and a jeep to events such as Armed Forces Day or Victorious and that attracts people to engage in conversations and engages them personally.

The museum also holds temporary exhibitions in the museum itself which engage local groups. The exhibition on 'Sewing Memories' enabled the artists they worked with to run extra workshops with LGBTQ groups, young carers, and vulnerable adults.

Ross noted, Katherine's report which referenced the recent Youth Engagement Project and the outputs from that project which were showcased in the museum which engendered a positive reaction from visitors and the community.

Ross advised they have a lot of engagement with local schools, mainly primary, with a large number of school visits throughout the year. November is the main month for the school's education programme.

Grace Scott advised that Southdown's college, Textiles and Fashion Course do a small display every year in the D-Day story with garments they have made inspired by the collections at the D-Day Story. The D-Day story is keen on giving a platform to schools and colleges as is the library service.

The Chair asked if the engagement is offered to secondary schools as well. Grace replied it was but mainly to primary schools. There is a writing competition for secondary schools but that was a difficult age range to reach out to. Ross advised the Youth Engagement Project was for secondary age.

Ross confirmed there were opportunities with the pop-ups to cross promote the other museum services across the city. Grace advised that vouchers are set out in community areas where there are low-income families for things like a free train ride in the museum or to participate in a craft session for free to encourage visitors to all the museums.

The Chair asked what they felt was missing from the high street that would support them and improve things.

Cathy said it was about joined up working and being able to find those opportunities that they may not necessarily know about due to the size of the council, for instance, if a shop becomes empty in a high footfall area that they could use. Having the resources behind the team so they could move quickly to fill that space after engaging with the public to see what they would be interested in.

The Panel asked what they felt the council does well that they would like the council to continue.

Grace mentioned the fantastic support the council gives to the cultural events and activities happening in the city such as with Portsmouth Creates where people can view their city with pride seeing the incredible art installations etc. This motivates people to go out and explore parts of the city they may not normally go to. This support had allowed the museum service to work with incredible creative organisations, do cross promoting and engage with people.

Ross noted that the impact this has on people should not be underestimated especially when they experience something for the first time. The pride local people have in the city and in the culture is huge.

Cllr Adeniran joined the meeting at 10:44am

Cathy told the panel that she has been liaising with Economic Development on several occasions and the business team to collaborate on projects across the city.

Cathy advised they are keen on doing more contemporary collections such as the culture of skating in the city, and other more modern history collections. When considering pop-ups in the high street the service goes out and engages with people to provide options rather than just imposing on them.

The Panel considered the need for better communication about cultural events going on across the city and suggested, for example, leaflets in the annual council tax bills.

There is a need for better awareness, communication to encourage more footfall in the high street and encourage more spending in local businesses.

Cathy observed Portsmouth has a wonderful museum service which they were all passionate about and they would like to encourage everyone to use the museums. She noted there had been a significant uplift in visitors - 10,000 ahead of the previous year.

Dave Percival - Libraries and Archive Services Manager

Dave told the panel that libraries work with the cultural services and would be part of the D-Day events in 2024. The library also works with the Rotary Club on Cosham awareness day, and they take the mobile library out onto the high street when members of the outreach team talk about the library and

encourage people to visit the library itself, which has great community resources and had capital investment over the last few years.

The library service supports a lot of the city council wider consultations which brings people into the libraries with new audiences and potential new members.

A lot of the libraries are in high street settings. North End library is an important, popular library and outside of Central and Southsea library is one of the biggest issuing libraries in the city. Funding has been received to carry out a refurbishment of the North End library which will commence on 22 January. Arts Council funding for the library's improvement fund allowing for improvements such as office pods and meeting spaces.

The Alderman Lacy library takes part in the Baffin's Christmas markets hosting the Father Christmas grotto each year which brings in many pupils from schools and their families and engaged a lot of local residents.

Of note, is the mobile library which attends some supermarket sites in the city which is a great opportunity for promoting services - not just the library.

The Beddow Library by Milton Park do an annual Halloween trail across the local shops and businesses there.

Southsea library is the most obvious high street location and is often used as a showcase for a lot of activities and art exhibitions. There has been recent recruitment to the history centre and for a new outreach officer to work with the family history resources.

The service is exploring external funding to build a Portsmouth music project which would enable QR codes on buildings that were music venues in the past. This would engage people who would not normally engage in the archives or libraries.

In relation to the question about what would work better in the city, Dave considered forward planning was really important to allow services to come together to create pop-ups and support each other. He also agreed with the idea of sharing resources.

Dave noted that local businesses help with promotions such as the distribution of promotional leaflets and posters, such as with the forthcoming Bookfest. Other venues are also used for these events.

The Chair noted the success of North End library with the summer reading challenge, but noted it is not so successful in schools completing it in Stamshaw, Hilsea, Copnor and Pauslgrove and wondered why and what could help get these venues better utilised.

Dave noted that Southsea library is only 10 years old whereas North End is 61 years old and needed refurbishment to show the community the investment in their area and space. With the reading challenge, the library

service is trying to promote the reading challenge plus schemes and have concentrated on schools in Paulsgrove and Cosham this summer to try and address the issue. The key is parental engagement.

Dave advised they do not do book exchanges as they tend to work more in rural areas, but the Somerstown hub has an informal library with a little box of donations. Paulsgrove Community Centre sometimes has collections of children's books as some people are not aware of the library nearby. They also have a second hand book shop.

The panel thought the word 'library' can be a barrier for some people but noted the new 'Tuk-tuk' which aims to encourage people to think again about the libraries. Dave advised the aim was to use the Tuk-tuk in high street settings and parks and to work with council departments to promote all services. It is fully sustainable, environmentally friendly and stands out with its bright colours. Dave said it is about evolving with the time and promoting the electronic elements of the service such as free music downloads and magazines.

Catherine Ramsay - Business Development and Projects Manager

Catherine told the panel they are a charity working in partnership with land-based museums and libraries and are looking at having desks in other settings in the city. The Hive is mainly based in the Central Library.

The Chair noted the importance of the Hive and the support it provides and asked what more could be done to help.

Catherine stated it is not about money but about the staffing of the Hive as it is a really small team with people who go out and do outreach. To sustain it on a regular basis they were reliant on recruiting volunteers. When you have volunteers, you need people to manage them. That continuing working with people in the city who want to become involved and harnessing their help with the resources to manage them properly.

The meeting concluded at 11.13 am.

Councillor Russell Simpson
Chair

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