

SUBJECT:	MUSEUMS FORWARD PLAN
MEETING:	Economy and Development Select Committee
DATE:	10 October 2019
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	ALL

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To set out a review of progress in delivering the Museums Forward Plan and to enable scrutiny of the remaining actions in the light of the establishment of MonLife.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 The committee is invited to scrutinise the progress made in delivering the Museums Forward Plan and the proposed prioritisation of the remaining actions, including the proposed feasibility study, prior to its further consideration by Cabinet.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 Cabinet approved the 2017-2022 Museums Forward Plan in December 2016. The findings and recommendations of the Amion Cultural Services Review, completed in June 2015, informed the Forward Plan. In making their key recommendations, Amion applied guiding principles for change:
- Each museum location should continue to have a means of telling its local story whereby the most distinctive stories and collections for each place should be selected and presented;
 - Centralised storage and skills would enable better delivery across the offer – a collections centre needing to have public access and research facilities;
 - The current staff structure is muddled and unbalanced and a clear centralised structure is needed;
 - There needs to be a strong on line presence for Monmouthshire's heritage;
 - Cross county trails are needed to link stories together and communicate the heritage offer outside of museums and buildings.

The overarching recommendations were therefore as follows:

- Create a centralised museum team with an effective leadership function;
- Create a collections centre/centralised store;
- Continue to provide local access to the county's heritage; and
- Create a properly resourced trading company (due to the intention to create an alternative delivery model this recommendation was dismissed).

- 3.3 The approved Forward Plan reflected these principles and included most, but not all, of Amion's detailed recommendations, under two strategic aims:

Strategic Aim 1 – To create a cross county museum offer to encourage a sense of pride and community identity whilst identifying opportunities for arts and cultural development.

Strategic Aim 2 – To ensure we have a resilient and sustainable service

Many of the core actions in the plan have been addressed and a summary of the progress made against the approved plan is appended (Appendix 2). It is now appropriate to review the delivery of the remaining actions particularly in the context of the establishment of MonLife, discussions with the National Lottery Heritage Fund and changes in the overall funding landscape. This review includes refining operational details in the light of operating experience, in particular considering the synergy and operational links across MonLife's establishment including attractions, learning, and business support, based on these strands:

- Visitor experience
- Retail opportunity
- Marketing
- Events coordination

Progress and Proposed Further Actions:

3.4 Centralised country wide team

– The 2017 museum restructure addressed this core action, including a revised centralised team structure, establishing consistent opening hours across sites and implementation of lone working

- New actions proposed: Refining details including staffing roles in the light of operating experience over the last 2 years and staff feedback. The aim is to consolidate the central team and administrative functions, and build operating resilience across MonLife's museums and attractions. These proposals are under development following the Council's employment policies and will be the subject of staff consultation and a future Individual Cabinet Member Report.

3.5 Collections Review

- Discussions with the National Lottery Heritage Fund have identified the starting point for consolidating county-wide collections as collection review / rationalisation. Accredited museums act within an agreed legal and ethical framework and have approved policies for developing their collections. This ensures that the public continue to have access to public collections – and that they continue to trust museums as responsible long-term guardians. Collections review, rationalisation and disposal are part of responsible collections management. A pilot collections rationalisation carried out as part of the move of our off-site store has so far examined 1108 objects and recommended 415 for disposal (note the off-site store is not representative of the whole collection).

Rationalising a collection is a lengthy process; items need to be assessed, and if they are no longer relevant to the museum, where they go next needs to be assessed. Managing the disposal of objects needs to be done both ethically and follow relevant guidance. The

Museums Association Disposal Toolkit provides a hierarchy for disposal including transfer to an Accredited Museum or to another institution/organisation within the public domain.

Following re-submission of a funding application to National Lottery Heritage Fund, we have recently been successful, as part of a wider MonLife Heritage Strategy project, in obtaining funding for a 14-month collection rationalisation programme with two Collection Review Assistants (12-month contracts from April 2020) and additional project lead-time.

This should allow significant progress in reviewing the collection and will result in a rationalisation / storage action and cataloguing action plan, and updated collections development plan.

3.6 Consolidated county-wide collections centre / local museums

This process will inform a thorough review of the collection to establish future storage requirements. The creation of a centralised store, with public access and research facilities remains a core objective, however realistically given the scale of the investment required, the challenges of the external funding environment and the capital programme it is a longer-term ambition.

The approved Forward Plan identifies the preferred location for a centralised store as Monmouth, together with the consolidation / redisplay of the Nelson Collection and space for a Monmouth museum, including community and volunteer space (and the MonLife learning strategy also highlights the importance of learning spaces) - this remains our aim

The approved Forward Plan also identifies the desire to maintain, adapt and improve existing museum locations at Chepstow and Abergavenny and allow better access to the Caldicot castle collection. Whilst the Forward Plan identified opportunities to improve the visitor experience that would flow from the creation of a centralised store, given the longer-term nature of this element it is necessary to decouple these elements.

The Forward Plan also identified specific projects at Abergavenny and Chepstow:

- Developing a covered events structure at Abergavenny Castle – given the refusal of planning permission no further action is proposed on this project;
- Provision of a café at Chepstow Museum – given the enhanced facilities at Chepstow TIC we no longer consider this appropriate and instead intend to work to provide clearer visitor pathways between the museum and the TIC so they can mutually benefit.

3.7 The revised priorities would be as follows:

Phase 1

- 1a. Options for the redisplay of the Nelson Collection and re-provision / redisplay of a Monmouth museum: Key stories identified - Nelson, Rolls, Monmouth Cap (including Henry V & Medieval Monmouth) / archaeology of the town
- 1b. Opportunities to improve the visitor experience, cultural, community and learning activities and access at Chepstow and Abergavenny museums and to the Caldicot collection within current display space

Phase 2

- 2a. Monmouth options for a centralised store with public access and research facilities
- 2b. Further opportunities to improve the visitor experience, cultural, community and learning activities and access at Chepstow, Abergavenny museums and Caldicot Castle utilising space released by the centralised store.

A comprehensive feasibility study is required to take forward and set outline costs for the options, in particular the building options in Monmouth and to confirm this phasing. The next step will be to define the detailed scope of this study and seek funding to carry it out.

3.8 Improving the visitor experience

In parallel, the other element of the approved National Lottery Heritage Fund grant will fund a Project Officer for an 18-month contract to prepare a heritage strategy for all of MonLife's managed heritage assets (museums and collections, attractions, countryside sites etc.). This includes assessments of assets, existing and potential audiences, and opportunities to improve interpretation / the stories they tell across the sites and the landscape. Although this funding is to support improved understanding, expertise and forward planning, rather than to fund improvements, it will help identify smaller scale action that we can take in the short term and future grant bids.

Retail

The MonLife Business Plan includes the action to improve the retail offer across all MonLife sites and the intention is to address this across the museums and attractions as a single project. Assessment of the suitability of existing systems, stock control etc. is underway and specialist retail advice is being sought. The proposed consolidation of administrative functions will support a combined retail offer across museums and attractions.

Marketing and Events

Similarly, marketing of the museum offer will now be under the "MonLife Heritage" brand, supported by MonLife's marketing and destination management teams. Legacy websites are being incorporated into Visit Monmouthshire and the new MonLife website under construction.

Work is also underway to ensure that MonLife presents a coordinated events programme across all of its sites, including museums.

Staff Training

The MonLife Heritage Strategy project includes a strong staff, volunteers, friends and supporters training element delivered in Winter 2020/21, intended to improve knowledge of the heritage assets to equip them to better inform and enthuse visitors.

Public opening times

The 2017 review established consistent public opening times across the museums. In May 2019, an Individual Cabinet Member Report approved an interim reduction in public opening hours to close on one day a week (Wednesday) throughout the season replacing

differing arrangements at each site. The closure to the public does not impact on other activity such as study courses and learning activity which can continue to be accommodated, indeed it provides an opportunity for greater such usage. It also provides an opportunity for staff to work collaboratively on projects, including collection review, delivering project outcomes, improving teamwork and ultimately the visitor experience. Further consideration is now being given to public opening hours and to the potential for seasonal variation to support the delivery of the Forward Plan.

3.9 Increasing engagement

The service has continued to develop engagement activities, the Museum Supporters scheme, volunteering, participation in The Happy Museum Project, Mencap access project and working with people living with dementia and their carers.

The MonLife Heritage Strategy project includes reviewing existing and potential new audiences; consultation with friends / supporters; with non-users and establishing a consultative panel to critically inform the heritage strategy, and help identify and prioritise the Monmouthshire stories we tell.

Learning programme

MonLife's learning activities are now combined to deliver the MonLife Learning Strategy intended to position MonLife as a serious, quality-driven provider of both formal and informal learning, providing an audience driven service that can meet future challenges, especially around changes to the national curriculum and demographics. Following a recent Individual Cabinet Member Decision a learning assistant to support a joint culture, heritage and environment learning service for museums, attractions and countryside is now in place. Consequently, the actions in the Forward plan are subsumed into this activity with the initial priority areas of formal learning and activity for older people, people living with Dementia and their carers. As noted above improvements in the provision of learning spaces across museum sites will form part of the feasibility study proposed.

Volunteering

As noted volunteering is supported across the service and the collections review will enable further opportunities. Promoting and supporting volunteering is an objective of the MonLife Business Plan and the museums will have a clear role in helping to deliver that as part of a more integrated approach to volunteer pathways in MonLife. Work is currently underway to consult more widely with volunteers on developing that future strategy.

Cultural/Arts activity

The museum service's strategic aims include identifying opportunities for arts and cultural development and within the new context of MonLife and the new Environment and Culture service grouping it is appropriate that the museum service takes a lead in these activities. The museums already provide a platform for residents and visitors to engage with arts and culture. The proposal is to consolidate existing activity within the service and undertake a wider assessment of MonLife's potential to contribute to the county's arts and culture offer and the development of a contemporary creative offer as set out as an objective of the Destination Management Plan.

4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

4.1 The work of the Museums Service holds the wellbeing of our Future Generations at its very heart. It is well documented that participation in cultural life improves people's wellbeing. Delivery of the Forward Plan will ensure a resilient and sustainable service into the future contributing to the economy, to health, cohesive communities and to a vibrant culture by supporting artistic, cultural, heritage and tourism activity (See Appendix 1)

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

Option	Benefits	Risks	Comments
Not to assess the revised priorities proposed in delivering the building aspects of the forward plan	No additional costs	No progress will be made on improvements to the museum sites pending funding a centralised store; lack of further progress due to uncertainty over detailed requirements / costs	Discussions with funders have made it clear that the collection review process needs to be completed first to inform any future bid for the centralised store
Undertaking a comprehensive feasibility study to deliver a phased approach	Will clarify the options, costs and phasing and together with the Heritage Strategy project inform future funding opportunities	Meeting the cost of the study	The costs of a feasibility study need to be established and any sources of external funding explored

6. EVALUATION CRITERIA

6.1 Progress will be monitored against the Museum Service Delivery Plan / MonLife's Business Plan utilising MonLife's approved performance and evaluation framework.

7. REASONS:

7.1 To inform members of progress in implementing the Museum Forward Plan.

7.2 The provision of a vibrant museum service make a positive contribution to the lives of the people of Monmouthshire and to those visiting the county, both physically and virtually. It ensures current and future generations can enjoy and access heritage, collections, arts and culture by protecting and conserving artefacts and built heritage and promoting and nurturing the arts.

7.3 The corporate plan identifies the need to implement the museums' review and enable community-led arts and heritage presence in each of our towns.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 8.1 The proposed operational changes can be met within MonLife's approved services budget. The MonLife Heritage Strategy project is funded by 90% grant (£176,700) over the 2019/20, 2020/21 & 2021/22 financial years, the match funding requirement £20,000 can also be met within MonLife's approved services budget.
- 8.2 The full cost of the proposals detailed in section 3.6 and 3.7 are yet to be established and will therefore be presented for approval as further detail is available. External funding streams will be investigated to reduce financial burden on the Authority.

9. CONSULTEES:

Cabinet Member for Governance
Chief Operating Officer MonLife

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Appendix 1: Equality and Future Generations Evaluation
Appendix 2: Progress in Delivery of the Museums Forward Plan
Appendix 3: Collections Review Process Flow Chart

Report to Cabinet 7th December 2016: Monmouthshire Museums: Transition and Forward Plans; Individual Cabinet Member Report 8 May 2019: Museum Service Interim Reduction in Opening Hours.

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