

**BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
RUSSELL COTES ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 January 2020 at 2.00 pm

Present:-

Stuart Bartholemew – Chairman

James Grasby – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr L Allison, Stuart Bartholomew, James Grasby, Cllr M Howell,
Cllr L Williams and Victoria de Wit

1. Election of Chairman of the Russell Cotes Art Gallery and Museum Management Committee

RESOLVED that Stuart Bartholomew be elected Chairman until the end of the Municipal Year.

Voting - Unanimous

2. Election of Vice-Chairman of the Russell Cotes Art Gallery and Museum Management Committee

RESOLVED that James Grasby be elected Vice-Chairman until the end of the Municipal Year.

Voting - Unanimous

3. Apologies

No apologies for absence were received.

It was noted that there was a current vacancy on the Committee following the resignation of Lorryne Blomfield.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest.

Other interests: Cllr L Williams declared that he was a member of the South West Arts Council.

5. Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 March 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

6. Public Items

There were no public questions, statements or petitions for this meeting.

7. Museum Update Report - October 2018 - October 2019

The Museum Manager presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to the Committee and a copy of which appears as Appendix A to these minutes in the Minute Book. The report provided an update on activity in relation to the Museum for the period October 2018 – October 2019.

The Museum Manager drew the Committee's attention to four major projects:

The exhibition in Southampton of 'Beyond the Brotherhood: The Pre-Raphaelite Legacy' on which the Russell-Cotes had worked in partnership with Southampton City Art Gallery with external funding. The Museum Manager highlighted the importance of achieving GIS for this exhibition, as this had enabled the insurance costs to be met. The exhibition was due to transfer to the Russell-Cotes during Spring 2020. The Committee was also informed of the centenary exhibition of Bournemouth Arts Club.

Reinterpretation and Redisplay: Work had started in April 2019, focusing on the Mikado, Red and Yellow Rooms. Funding for this work had been kickstarted by a £6,000 initial contribution from the Mayor's Fund. The work was subject to a tight timescale, to be completed in 2020.

Museum Accreditation: It was noted that work to maintain accreditation would require a number of policies and plans to be signed off by the Committee prior to submission in February 2021.

Governance Arrangements: A major review was now underway, following the decision of the Committee in 2019 to support the move to full independence. This was the subject of a separate update report on the agenda.

The report also gave a summary of visitor numbers and performance. Income targets for 2019 in relation to admissions and the café were on target, and the shop was performing better than expected. The fluctuation in visitor numbers between 2015 and 2019 was attributed to a number of factors, including particular exhibitions, marketing, price changes, and seasonal variation (the impact of good weather).

The Committee discussed opportunities in the short term to attract more visitors to the café. It was noted that the café was no longer the driver it had been under the previous operator. There was general agreement that the café's current location was not ideal and was perceived to be accessible only to those visiting the museum as well. The Committee discussed the feasibility of relocating to the ground floor and providing an outdoor pop-up facility with seating in the garden. The Museum Manager explained that

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unfortunately there was no easy solution or available resource to make short term changes to the internal layout of the building. The use of the outside area had been previously explored but not progressed for various reasons of viability. The Committee noted that a wholesale reconfiguration of the museum would require significant investment.

The Committee agreed that a spatial assessment of the building would assist the development of a longer-term strategic plan for the museum. The Museum Manager explained that the Forward Plan for 2020 – 2024 would enable the museum to refocus and create a more sustainable offer for the future. Members of the Committee raised the following points in discussion:

- The level of income from the museum in the context of the current staff base was excellent compared to other museums in Dorset.
- The expectations of the visiting public had changed considerably over the last few decades.
- The museum could not accommodate all the facilities it would like to by making small scale changes.
- Any major development of the museum required a holistic approach.
- Future plans should not compromise the visitor experience.
- The Russell Cotes was not built to be museum and there were significant challenges in displaying the collection to its full potential within the confines of a domestic property.
- The collection itself was vast, eclectic and included high quality individual pieces which warranted national profile in their own right.
- Relocating some of the collection would require serious consideration, as it could detract from the collection as a whole.
- There were opportunities to increase the public benefit of the collection through temporary displays and outreach work. Suggestions included loaning items or using facsimile and projection, for display in the public realm in areas of high visibility/footfall, using empty retail units, and holding taster sessions.
- Successful programming could have a significant impact on visitor numbers, in attracting both new and return visitors. It was noted that the formation of BCP Council facilitated a more balanced offer across the area.
- It was imperative to apply for significant investment funding once the future direction of the museum was established and an operating framework in place.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Culture explained the purpose of the Cultural Enquiry which was underway across the BCP Council area. He also reported that the Council was working to develop a heritage trail and welcomed any suggestions on this from Committee members.

RESOLVED that the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum 12 month review report for the period October 2018 – October 2019 be accepted and the actions suggested going forward in the report be agreed.

Voting - Unanimous

8. Acquisitions, Loans and Disposals

The Museum Manager presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to the Committee and a copy of which appears as Appendix B to these minutes in the Minute Book.

The report provided an update on new acquisitions to the collection, the loan of paintings to other institutions, and the items in the collection which were proposed for disposal in accordance with the Collections Development Strategy and the Museums Association Code of Ethics.

Appendix 2 of the report provided a detailed assessment prepared by the Museum Curator for each of the 12 ship models recommended for disposal. It was not possible to display or store these items properly and they did not form part of the museum's core offer. The Museum Manager outlined the process undertaken when disposing of an item, in transferring it to another suitable museum or public collection directly or through wider museum community advertisement. It was noted that the model of the P.S. Bournemouth Queen was recommended for transfer to Poole Museum due to its local connection.

RESOLVED that:

- a. the acquisitions and loans outlined in the report be noted.**
- b. the disposals outlined in the report be approved.**

Voting - Unanimous

9. Forward Plan and Action Sheet

The Museum Manager presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to the Committee and a copy of which appears as Appendix C to these minutes in the Minute Book.

The Committee was advised that the previous Forward Plan expired in 2019. The new Forward Plan 2020-2024 had been developed in consultation with staff, volunteers and stakeholders, and was attached as an appendix to the report. It was a requirement of Museum Accreditation to have a formally adopted Forward Plan in place. The Forward Plan set out the key objectives for the museum over the next five years and identified seven priority areas. It was supplemented by an Action Plan, also appended to the report, which supported the delivery of each priority. The Action Plan was regularly updated and kept under review by the Committee.

The Museum Manager explained the context of the Forward Plan within the wider review of the museum's governance arrangements, as summarised in

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paragraph 3 of the report. She responded to questions from members of the Committee on the following points:

- Action Plan, 3.3 – Increase in visitor numbers of 10% by 2023. She was confident that this was target was achievable as long as a clear vision for the future of the Russell-Cotes was established.
- Whether different interpretation methods could be explored, such as the use of students or actors (for example in the Irving Room). She explained that various approaches had been tried in the past. All options were being considered as part of the work to establish a clear vision for the museum, with ideas being explored in a focus group looking at audience development.

The Chairman commented on the need to consider the Forward Plan and Action Plan as part of the emerging governance arrangements and proposed externalisation of the museum. He suggested that the Forward Plan and Action Plan be noted at this stage and considered further at the next meeting of the Committee, by which time greater clarity on the future direction of the museum would be available.

RESOLVED that the report on the Museum Forward and Action Plan be noted and reconsidered at the next meeting of the Committee.

Voting - Unanimous

10. Governance Review Update

The Museum Manager presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to the Committee and a copy of which appears as Appendix D to these minutes in the Minute Book. The report set out the background to the governance review and outlined progress to date in preparing a full business case for the Russell Cotes to move to full independent trust status, to be agreed and presented to Cabinet later in the year.

The Museum Manager explained that work had only been able to be progressed in the last few months partly due to local government reorganisation. Section 2 of the report provided a summary of the key principles emerging from the work undertaken by the internal Project Board and museum staff with support from external consultants. These principles related to governance, the business plan, building maintenance, staff, pensions, VAT and the Council. The table in Appendix 1 of the report provided a more detailed update on specific issues.

The Committee was advised that the charitable vehicle being considered was a Foundation Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). There were a number of areas still to be addressed before recommending this option, including the question of its ineligibility for loans, accreditation requirements, trustee numbers and committee membership. In the context of membership Victoria de Wit advised that changes to deeds should be avoided where possible as this ensured a smoother transition.

Victoria de Wit reported that she was looking at exemplars of Transfer of Asset documents in respect of the building and the collection. The Committee discussed the role and obligations of BCP Council in the proposed CIO, particularly in relation to conservation issues and building maintenance. The Director of Destination and Culture (BCP Council) reported that the Council was keen to progress from the current management arrangements and wanted all assets (building and collection) to remain as one. Victoria de Wit explained that it was difficult to find a direct comparison as most of the models she was researching had transferred from a position of direct local authority control rather than the Council as trustee.

The Committee agreed that further information was required in relation to the implications of a CIO before it could be recommended as the best option. The Committee felt that independent legal advice and an independent survey of the building's condition should be provided. Victoria de Wit reported that fast track funding may be available for the building survey from the resilience strand of the Heritage Lottery Fund. Subject to costs the Arts Council may provide funding for legal advice. The Director of Destination and Culture agreed to take forward these requests on behalf of the Committee. It was suggested that the Committee consider arranging an informal meeting to provide further input into the development of the business case before it was finalised. Members of the Committee were invited to contact the Director with any additional issues to be explored.

The Committee was assured that in case of financial failure the assets would be returned to the Council in trust.

RESOLVED that

- a. Progress on the development of the business case to date be noted.**
- b. An informal meeting of the Committee be arranged to enable further input into the development of the business case.**
- c. The Committee meets to review and approve the business case when it is finalised for submission to Cabinet.**

Voting - Unanimous

11. Draft Annual Accounts 2018-2019

The Company Accountant (BCP Council) provided a verbal update on the progress of the draft annual accounts for the financial year 2018-2019, a copy of which had been previously circulated by email to the Committee.

As the audit on the draft accounts was not yet complete the Committee was asked to delegate authority to the Chairman and the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Culture to sign off the final audited accounts, which would be available in early February. The Committee commented on the

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unsatisfactory timescales in submitting the final accounts and requested that this be addressed in future, while noting that the impact of local government reorganisation may have contributed to the delay this year. The Chairman asked if there was likely to be any major variance between the draft and final accounts, and the Company Accountant advised that he wasn't aware of this.

RESOLVED that the signing off of the final audited accounts for the 2018/2019 financial year be delegated to the Chairman of the Management Committee and the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Culture (Cllr M Howell).

Voting - Unanimous

12. Future Meeting Dates

The Committee asked that arrangements for future meetings be progressed as follows:

- Informal Management Committee workshop to input into development of the business case – to be held during March/April
- Formal Management Committee meeting to be held at an appropriate time during the lead in period for 29 July Cabinet meeting, to enable review and approval of the business case prior to consideration by Cabinet.

The meeting ended at 3.43 pm

CHAIRMAN