

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

COUNCIL: 26TH FEBRUARY 2020

REFERENCE FROM CABINET: 10TH FEBRUARY 2020

“C221 REQUEST FOR CONSIDERATION – MUSEUM PROVISION IN THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN (REF) –

At the meeting of the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee on 16th January, 2020, Councillor Dr. I.J. Johnson presented his Request for Consideration which related to museum provision in the Vale of Glamorgan.

Councillor Dr. Johnson began by referring to the Expert Review of Local Authority Museum Provision published in 2015, which highlighted that 20 of the 22 Local Authorities in Wales funded some form of museum provision. One of the two not to fund a provision was the Vale of Glamorgan.

Councillor Johnson then raised a point regarding the length of time that it had taken for a report to be produced, stating that his original request had been submitted in January 2019. He then raised a second point regarding the content of the report which he felt did not cover the desirability of having a museum provision but talked a lot about why it could not be provided. He stated that the Council needed to be more creative and asked for more positivity and consideration of the Council establishing and operating an accredited museum in the Vale of Glamorgan. Councillor Johnson therefore wanted to see a wide discussion on the topic of museum provision across the Vale of Glamorgan.

In reply, the Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources stated that he took on board the Member's point regarding length of time taken to produce the report. He stated that there had been an issue around capacity and a number of competing priorities. In terms of desirability around a museum in the Vale of Glamorgan, he stated that it was important for the report to set the context and for this to be led by Members on how the Council progressed, so it was important for the report to 'set the scene' first.

The Culture and Community Learning Manager then referred to the report which advised that the Vale of Glamorgan was home to two local museums: Barry Island War Museum, located in the historic Barry Island Station, and the Cowbridge and District Museum, located in the Cowbridge Town Hall. Neither museum was in receipt of any Local Authority funding, but the Cowbridge Museum had received accreditation.

The Barry Island War Museum was operated by the Barry at War Group (Voluntary) and offers an authentic wartime experience.

The Cowbridge and District Museum was founded in the early 1980's and focused on Cowbridge's past. The museum exhibits were housed in the Town Hall cells. In April 2017, the Museum received formal accreditation from MALD – the Museums, Archives, Libraries Division (Wales).

Both Vale Museums were open only a few times per month and at specific times. Barry Library held a local studies collection which contained numerous items including books, maps and photographs. It also contributed to the online digital archive called the 'People's Collection Wales', a national digital initiative funded by the Museum's Archives and Libraries Division (MALD) and based in the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

Glamorgan Archives collected records relating to the history of Glamorgan and its people. Records could range from, papers, plans, photographs, parchments, personal diaries, and Council minutes. The Glamorgan Archives were particularly interested in hosting records that were in danger of destruction or decay so that they may be saved for future generations.

The Vale of Glamorgan did not have any Council operated or funded local museum provision. There was no statutory obligation on Local Authorities in Wales to provide museum services.

There was currently no provision for Council operated local museum provision in the Vale. Establishment of such a provision would require a establishing an increase to the existing budget, or establishment of a separate budget to facilitate the following considerations:

- Physical space for artistic collections. This may necessitate establishment of controlled environments to facilitate the preservation of historic works;
- Staffing for a museum archivist for the curation of physical or digital collections, and administrative support associated with accreditation, logistics and maintenance;
- Additional provision for marketing, communications and security;
- Increases to insurance and liability cover.

On average in Wales approximately 20% of museum running costs were covered by revenue. The remaining 80% of funding came from grants, national funding and / or subsidies from Local Authorities.

A Virtual Museum could be considered to enable sharing large amounts of information without the technical, and physical storage requirements. In the past The Vale Libraries Digital Project had encouraged local people to bring in their photos for uploading to the People's Collection Wales. This type of project, if properly resourced, could help to collate an online innovative Virtual Museum for the Vale. Links to information via the National Archive was already available and could be further developed. Digitised information could be accessed via personal devices such as mobile phones, tablets, computers or dedicated digital interactive systems across the Vale of Glamorgan in libraries and historic venues.

A purely digital provision would however still incur revenue costs associated with management and maintenance of a digital platform, alongside staffing costs for a digital archivist, and ancillary costs associated with a digital platform such as software licences, hosting and digital security.

The standards and quality systems in most frequent use in Wales were the Accreditation Scheme for Museums in the UK and Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme Cymru (VAQAS). The Museums, Archives and Libraries Division (MALD) accreditation was a national UK accreditation awarded by Arts Council of England (ACE). Other relevant standards, including Investors in People, Investing in Volunteers, PQASSO32 and EFQM33 were also available.

The Accreditation schemes set minimum standards for museum provision. As at May 2015, there were 98 museums in the VAQAS accreditation scheme in Wales.

To retain Accreditation, museums must demonstrate compliance with all aspects of the standard by completing a return every three years. In the interim, museums were required to inform the Welsh Government's MALD of any planned significant changes to their operations.

Both obtaining and maintaining accreditation would have ongoing revenue implications in the monitoring and reporting which would be required.

The Welsh Government expert review of Local Museums in Wales (2015) acknowledged that although Museums in Wales were significant and housed important local information and artefacts in 20 of the 22 Local Authority areas, reductions in budgets was eventually likely to lead to reduced opening times, collections not being developed, charges being introduced for some services, staff reductions, exhibitions being curtailed and many other signs of services under stress leading inevitably to museum closures. Developing Council operated accredited museum provision at this time and under current financial challenges affecting statutory services would be difficult to rationalise. The implications and cost of running a museum in the Vale of Glamorgan should therefore be carefully considered.

There was no national funding available to Local Authorities from Welsh Government linked to the provision of museum services.

The total Arts development budget for 2019/20 was £129k. This budget was set to reduce to £108k in the forthcoming 2020/21 financial year. It was anticipated that operating a dedicated physical museum provision would cost an additional £100-150k (approximately) per annum. This was based on the existing running costs of the Arts Central Gallery space, at £84k for the 2019/20 financial year, and the additional costs associated with maintaining museum collections, such as appropriate lighting, temperature and humidity-controlled conditions, additional security considerations and human resource implications. A separate consultation was due with regards to the use of the Arts Central Gallery space as part of the Council's strategy for Arts and Culture. Repurposing the space as a museum could be considered as part of those proposals.

Learning and Skills currently employed a single Arts Development Officer for managing its Arts provision in the Vale. There was currently no administration support for any Arts and Culture services. Additional staffing would be required in the form of a specialist museum archivist to manage and curate any physical / digital collections. Dedicated administration support would also be required for managing accreditation, monitoring returns and supporting any revenue management associated with the provision, should the Council's strategy on fees and charges be levied.

A number of Council funding streams exist to support community growth and facilities, including:

- Stronger Communities:
<https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/working/Business-Support/Strong-Communities-Grant.aspx>
- Community Grants:
<https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/working/Community-Grants.aspx>
- Business Funding:
<https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/working/Business-Support/Business-Funding.aspx>
- Mayor's Foundation:
https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/our_council/Council-Structure/The-Mayor/Mayors-Foundation-Grant-Fund.aspx

External funding streams were also available from MALD, the Federation of Museums and Art Galleries Wales, National Lottery Heritage Fund, and The Community Fund, for example. Each funding stream was contingent of meeting specified criteria, such as being an existing accredited museum, or for capital work.

In addition, the Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources advised that there were many ways in which collections could be displayed, such as digital or offering a physical space in a school or community resources. Therefore, he stated that there were some opportunities there.

In outlining some of their initial thoughts, a number of Committee Members commented on the report which could be summarised as follows:

- There was opportunity to establish facilities for collections and there were other models away from a museum;
- There was an assumption that Barry would be the best location for a Vale Museum, but there were other locations;
- The cost to establish a museum, which was in the region of £150k, was prohibitive at a time of shrinking budgets and there was little justification in spending money this way when the Directorate should be prioritising children, safeguarding and education;
- There was scope to work in partnership with Town and Community Councils;
- With regard to Barry, its history would be known across the world and so it was important to look at how collections could be displayed. Costs however

were high and it was important not to undertake “vanity projects” at a time when the budgets were challenging;

- The report was too narrow in its focus and did not outline opportunities for tourism and the importance of raising civic pride;
- Where museums had been established this had also led to shops and restaurants being set up, so a museum in the centre of Barry would be a boost to the town;
- Digital and physical spaces did not necessarily increase footfall to town centres;
- There were a lot of national museums located in Cardiff and it would be nice for there to be some provision in Barry;
- Austerity did not mean that the Council could not be ambitious, and grants and funding were available, which had to be looked into otherwise our history could be lost;
- Llantwit Major had a Historical Society which used volunteers to look after collections in a local church. Therefore, the Council did not necessarily need to provide a physical building but the key was attracting volunteers. Perhaps there was opportunity to look at how collections could be provided on a small scale with the support of volunteers and to see what could be built up from there;
- Cowbridge had a vibrant museum which could be used as a model. The first step would be to assess the interest of volunteers to assist with any venture getting off the ground;
- St. Athan had recently seen an aviation museum set up, which had been well received. It was important to maintain cultural and historic heritage, but this was down to the money available, so the Council should start on a small scale to see if that was successful;
- The role of curators should not be forgotten as it was a professional undertaking to look after and manage collections;
- History and culture were a fundamental part of the new curriculum in Wales, so all schools had to offer something to its pupils;
- There were opportunities to obtain grant funding to maintain local history and culture, so this should not be at the expense of education.

In being asked to comment, the Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration stated that it was important for the Committee to understand some of the context and costings to develop a museum and one important aspect of the work of the Council was the Sense of Place Board. The Board had developed the Barry Story Book which was a fascinating read and so the Council was looking to maintain the culture and history of Barry in order to create a destination for tourists. Therefore, the Council needed to assess what it was doing, but if it was to create a museum then this needed to be done properly. There were questions to ask such as should it be the Vale of Glamorgan Council and discussions held back in 2012 had been challenging because of the number and range of history groups which needed to work together. The Cabinet Member advised that the Vale of Glamorgan Council had been doing things to support local groups and she referred to the Iolo Morganwg Walk and local walks around Barry which were very popular. She therefore hoped that the Council could work more closely with these groups. In addition, a lot of information was available online which was maintained by local community groups.

Finally, the Cabinet Member stated that heritage was taken very seriously, and the Vale was lucky in having some very diverse communities and so it was important to consider what the Council wanted to do and how it engaged with organisations and history groups to ensure that the cultural heritage was protected.

The Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources stated that there were electronic links contained within the report which showed what grants were available, some of which referred to volunteers. There were mechanisms and areas such as libraries that volunteers could help and other venues such as schools which could be used for events. He stated that the Council was happy to look to facilitate these.

A Committee Member recommended that the Council should scope the idea of working with local communities / groups to encourage volunteers. In reply, the Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resources stated that he would be happy to do this.

Councillor Dr. Johnson, in being asked to come back on some of the points raised, stated that he was glad that there had been a wide-ranging debate and he appreciated the financial issues, but £150k was not large for an organisation with a budget of £220m. He stated that he agreed with the comment around curators and the professionals needed to maintain collections and he supported the recommendation regarding a further report around opportunity for volunteers and working with community groups. He therefore asked for a full Cabinet report regarding the Council's plans to set out the work it was doing including all options available and within the wider context.

A Member of the Committee then made another recommendation regarding artefacts and displays within Vale of Glamorgan Council offices and facilities such as libraries, and she suggested that these spaces could be shared with historical societies and for this to be looked into further. In reply, the Head of Strategy, Community Learning and Resource stated that this would be considered.

The Cabinet Member also suggested that it would be worth the Scrutiny Committee inviting the Chairman of the Sense of Place Board to provide a presentation of the work undertaken.

Finally, the Committee considered the financial aspects and a Committee Member stated that the budget for the Arts and Culture should be maintained if not increased. The Committee agreed for this to be a formal recommendation to Cabinet.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T Cabinet agree for officers to scope opportunities to work with historic societies and community groups around the establishment of local exhibitions on a small scale and for the outcome of this to be reported back to the Scrutiny Committee.

- (2) T H A T Cabinet receives a report on museum provision in order for it to consider what the Council can do and to outline the Council's strategy.
- (3) T H AT Cabinet agree that the budget for the Arts and Culture is either held at the current level or increased in order to retain development.
- (4) T H A T Cabinet approves officers to look at possibilities of displaying artefacts in Vale of Glamorgan Council spaces such as libraries or community facilities in partnership with historical societies and community groups in order to share costs.
- (5) T H A T the Scrutiny Committee receive a presentation from the Chairman of the Sense of Place Board regarding cultural heritage.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) To explore the possibility of establishing local exhibitions on a small scale and for the outcome of this to be reported back to the Committee.
- (2) In order to outline the Council's strategy and in order to maintain funding.
- (3) To maintain or increase spending on the development of the Arts and Cultural heritage.
- (4) In order to consider the feasibility of displaying artefacts in the Vale of Glamorgan Council spaces such as libraries and community facilities.
- (5) In order for the Committee to consider the work undertaken to protect cultural heritage.

Councillor Burnett had attended the Scrutiny Committee meeting and noted there had been detailed and widespread discussions concerning the ongoing work in the Vale.

With regards to Recommendation (2), Cabinet requested that the matter be referred to the Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen Group in order to consider establishing a Task and Finish Group for the matter.

It was further noted that the Recommendations referenced the current ongoing consultation concerning the Arts Strategy and interested parties should use the consultation to include comments on aspects such as museums as part of their returns, which would be relevant as part of wider conversations.

Cabinet, having considered the recommendations of the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee,

RESOLVED –

(1) T H A T the contents of the report, the amount of work currently ongoing in this area, the current consultation process concerning the Arts Strategy and current budgetary considerations be noted and be referred to Full Council on 26th February, 2020.

(2) T H A T with regards to the Scrutiny Committee’s Recommendation (2) above, the matter be referred to the Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen Group in order to consider establishing a Task and Finish Group for the matter.

Reasons for decisions

(1) In view of the contents of the report.

(2) In order that the Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen Group can consider the matter.”