

Report to Norwich Area Museums Committee
26 January 2009
Item No. 5

Co-opted membership of the Norwich AMC

Report by the Head of Norwich Museums and Archaeology

Summary

This report reviews current co-option arrangements and asks members to discuss and agree future arrangements.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Joint Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Agreements of 1999 and 2006 set out the composition of Area Museums Committees. The membership allows for the co-option of five additional non-voting members:

“The Area Committees may co-opt at their discretion up to 5 non-voting members including one representative of the independent museums in the relevant area and one representative of the Friends organisations supporting the Joint Committee’s museums (if any) in the relevant area.”

- 1.2 In June 2008 the Norwich Area Museums Committee became aware that it had six rather than five co-opted members and was concerned that it was in contravention of the Joint Museums and Archaeology Agreement by so doing.

Following detailed investigation into the circumstances leading to this situation, this paper sets out how the situation came about and recommends a way forward.

2 Background

- 2.1 At its meeting on 19 October 2000, the Norwich Area Museums Committee agreed its terms of reference and that, subject to ratification by the Joint Committee, the following organisations with a particular remit for museums should be asked to nominate non-voting members of the committee:

- Friends of Norwich Museums (also representing the Regimental Museum Trustees and the Costume & Textiles Association);
- UEA (representing the Sainsbury Centre and the independent museum interest);
- East Anglia Arts Foundation (now East Anglia Art Fund);
- Norfolk Contemporary Arts Society.

This left one vacant co-opted place, to be filled after further consideration.

The Norwich AMC operated for two and a half years on this basis. The situation changed in 2003 when the Norwich AMC considered a report at its meeting on 25 February 2003 which asked whether South Norfolk and Broadland District Councils should be invited to take a formal role in the Norwich AMC. The Committee resolved to recommend to the Norfolk Joint Museums & Archaeology Committee that the Committee wished to invite one representative from each of Broadland and South Norfolk District Councils to be co-opted to the Committee on a non-voting basis.

- 2.2 Following discussion at the Joint Museums & Archaeology Committee meeting on 21 March 2003 it was resolved:-

“That the Joint Museums Committee agree to a proposal from the (Norwich) Area Committee that one representative from each of Broadland and South Norfolk District Councils be co-opted to the Area Committee on a non-voting basis.”

It was not stated whether these co-options should be part of the five co-optees specified in the Norwich AMC terms of reference, or in addition to them, in which case the representatives from Broadland and South Norfolk could only be observers rather than co-optees. If it was intended that the number of co-optees on the Norwich Area Museums Committee should be increased no mention was made at the time and no change was made to the Joint Agreement.

- 2.3 As a result of this resolution the Norwich AMC welcomed Cllr John Bracey from Broadland District Council at its meeting on 1 July 2003. Cllr David Pond from South Norfolk District Council joined the committee at its meeting on 24 February 2004. Broadland and South Norfolk are currently represented by Cllr Bracey and Cllr Savage respectively.

- 2.4 The Norwich AMC operated with a total of six non-voting co-opted representatives until its meeting on 6 February 2008.

Following a suggestion by the then Chair (Councillor Brenda Ferris), discussion took place on whether it would be possible to invite the Costume & Textiles Association to be appointed as a Co-opted non-voting representative to the Committee. The Costume & Textiles Association would welcome the opportunity to be co-opted onto the committee in its own right, rather than being represented by the Friends of Norwich Museums, as it was keen to take a more active part in furthering the aims and objectives of the Norwich museums, especially relating to improved access to and promotion of the costume and textiles collection.

At this point it was realised that the Norwich AMC had been operating unconstitutionally with six co-opted members rather than five. As members agreed that it was desirable for the C&TA to join the Committee, it was resolved to ask the Norfolk Joint Museums & Archaeology Committee to amend the Committee's constitution to allow for up to seven Co-opted Non-Voting Members to enable a representative to be appointed by the Costume and Textile Association.

- 2.5 The Norfolk Joint Museums & Archaeology Committee considered the request on 14 March 2008. Rather than formally amend the Joint Museums & Archaeology Agreement, which would involve negotiations with all participating local authorities, the Committee agreed that a compromise would be to ask other non-voting members who were unable to attend meetings regularly to cede their non-voting membership and attend future meetings as observers.
- 2.6 Members and officers discussed the arrangements for the appointment of Co-opted Non Voting Members to the Norwich AMC at its meeting of 16 June 2008. The Committee resolved to establish a working group comprising of the Chair, Vice-Chair, Councillor Wyatt and Vanessa Trevelyan, Head of Museums and Archaeology to consider the current arrangements for co-option to the Committee, and to ask the Head of Museums and Archaeology to arrange an initial meeting of the new working group and report back to the next meeting.

The Head of NMAS wrote to the Working Group on 19 June 2008 setting out the issues to be resolved, suggesting a way forward and asking if members wanted her to arrange a meeting to discuss it in more detail.

In the event the Working Group met without the Head of NMAS and tabled a paper at the meeting on 29 September 2008 setting out various recommendations.

- 2.7 Before the Norwich AMC meeting on 16 June 2008, the representative of the Norfolk Contemporary Art Society resigned. There was some confusion at the 16 June 2008 meeting when Brenda Ferris was not allowed to take her place as the new representative of the Norfolk Contemporary Arts Society (NCAS) as no letter had been received before the meeting. Subsequently, Felicity Hartley was appointed as the new representative of the NCAS and, despite a letter having been received, there was again confusion at the 29 September 2008 Norwich AMC meeting as to whether she should be able to take her place. At the meeting on 29 September 2008, members of the Norwich AMC suggested that this provided an opportunity to revert to five co-options as specified in the Joint Museums & Archaeology Agreement.
- 2.8 In the light of all these developments the Head of NMAS offered to investigate the history of the co-options in more detail and to come to the next formal meeting of the committee with a report for consideration, so that members could discuss and resolve how non-voting members

- would be nominated in the future.
- 2.9 The view of Andy Emms, Democratic Services Manager at Norwich City Council is that the decision to invite representation from the Norfolk Contemporary Art Society has not been formally revoked by the committee and that Felicity Hartley, who had been nominated by the NCAS, should be allowed to take her place pending a formal decision on future co-options.

Subsequently the representative of UEA expressed concern that the committee was not sufficiently focussed on the development of the museums service. A letter of resignation has since been received.

3 **Organisations wishing to be co-opted onto the Norwich AMC**

The following is a list of those organisations that have expressed a wish to nominate representatives onto the Norwich AMC, with a brief summary of their connection with and support for the Norwich museums.

Organisation	Reason for wishing to be co-opted
South Norfolk District Council	Wishes to take an active part in discussing the operations of the Norwich museums. Contributes c£10k per year towards the costs of the Service.
Broadland District Council	Wishes to take an active part in discussing the operations of the Norwich museums.
Friend of Norwich Museums	Support group founded in 1920 to assist with the purchase of collections, provide voluntary help and generate public support and interest. Currently provides up to £40k per year for the purchase of collections.
East Anglia Art Fund	Founded in 1991 to bring top quality art shows to Norwich Castle, and generate public and corporate support. Currently provide up to £40k per year to enable the art exhibition programme.
Norfolk Contemporary Art Society	Supported Norwich Castle for over 50 years with loans and gifts of works of art, together with small grants to assist with purchase. Value of total contribution in excess of £600k.

Costume & Textiles
Association

Formed in 1989 to support and advocate the Norwich costume and textiles collection. Volunteer and financial support for object purchases. Organises high profile events to raise awareness of Norwich's textile history.

4 **Conclusion**

The practice of co-opting non-voting members onto the Norwich Area museums Committee enables the representation of organisations that are major supporters of the Norwich museums, in one case for almost a century. The attendance of these organisations should be welcomed and encouraged. Where interest exceeds the number of co-opted places available, representatives should be invited as observers and given full opportunity to contribute to the debate.

5 **Recommendation**

1. To continue to invite the following organisations to nominate a representative to be co-opted as a non-voting member onto the Committee:

- South Norfolk District Council
- Broadland District Council
- Friend of Norwich Museums
- East Anglia Art Fund
- Norfolk Contemporary Art Society

2. To invite the Costume & Textiles Association to nominate a representative to be an observer to the Committee to be given equal opportunity to contribute to the debate as the non-voting co-opted members.

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper please get in touch with:

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