

Review of Norfolk Museums Service

Report by the Chairman of the Cabinet Working Group

Summary

This report informs Cabinet of the work undertaken by the Member working group and its conclusions and recommendations.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to support the working group's conclusions and its recommendations at Appendix A of the annexed report.

Background

At its meeting on 2 April 2012, Cabinet agreed to commission a detailed review of the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (NMAS) and to appoint a cross party working group chaired by Councillor George Nobbs to undertake this work. The working group's terms of reference are available at Appendix B of the annexed report from its Chairman.

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

This report does not have any implications for equality issues.

Section 17 – Crime and Disorder Act

There are no implications for crime and disorder reduction.

Environmental implications

There are no environmental implications arising from the working group's report.

Risk implications/assessment

This report is not making any recommendations that have risk implications.

Any other implications

All the implications which members should be aware of have been considered and there are no others to take into account.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to support the working group's conclusions and its recommendations at Appendix A of the annexed report.

Reason for decision

The working group's recommendations are intended to improve the governance and management arrangements for the museums service.

Alternative options

Cabinet could decide not to support the working group's recommendations.

Officer Contact

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

Keith Cogdell Tel. 01603 222785 email: keith.cogdell@norfolk.gov.uk



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Cabinet

Review of Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (NMAS)

Report by the Chairman of the Cabinet Working Group

December 2012

www.norfolk.gov.uk

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Chairman's Foreword

Our Museum service is held in great affection by the people of Norfolk and not least by me. I have loved our museums since, as a small schoolboy I discovered the Castle in Norwich and it became my Saturday morning treat. That was in the days when all museums were free. So it was a great pleasure to see the massive queues winding round that same Castle Keep a few weeks ago on the occasion of the national free museums night. This week I was delighted to be among the many people who thronged to the East Anglia Art Fund's special exhibition *Art and Vision* - the first of its type for 4 years; and last Sunday I visited *Time and Tide* - a superb example of how a museum can reflect a whole community and create that elusive thing – a sense of ownership. Indeed, during the last few months I and my colleagues on the working group have once again visited and revisited every one of our museums in Norfolk.

So there is much to admire and to celebrate but, acting as a candid friend, we have found that many improvements can be made and many new ideas need to be embraced. For example, the lack of any attempt to exploit the sheer pre-eminence and setting of Norwich Castle is surely just one obvious case of a lost opportunity. We have also commissioned new research which included asking for the views of current *non*-visitors – something that in the past there seems to have been an odd lack of curiosity about.

We feel that we owe it to the previous generations of individuals, who gave so freely to their local museums in the expectation that the collections would be for all the people of their local community (the superb Colman Bequest for example), and to the pioneering local councils who provided vital funds in the early days that we speak frankly now when making our recommendations.

Governance (or its effective lack) is at the heart of the problem. If it has been possible for the Museums service to be described as being run “like a private fiefdom”, it is largely because it has been allowed to do so. Senior management have made decisions which they, no doubt, thought were in the best interests of the service but effective input from elected bodies, prior consultation *with* them and reporting *to* them, has been lacking in many cases. Given the changes that are taking place, we feel that it is now timely and opportune for a new leadership style in the service.

It has not been possible to address the issue of the various voluntary bodies or the many volunteers because, with the need for decisions on purely local government involvement, we have not yet been able to explore that area. We would also like to say that, although we have made serious efforts to hear the views of staff, we are very disappointed that some staff were still not made aware of our offer to listen to them.

Before I come to our main recommendations, I wish to pay a heartfelt tribute to all those colleagues who saw this review through to its conclusion. This has been a very time-consuming and detailed task and they have enthusiastically thrown themselves into it. There was much more that we could have looked at (and after a suitable break, may be asked to examine) but conscious of time we have concentrated on the two essential aspects of governance and management. We are also very grateful to all the witnesses, many of whom gave up their own free time to assist us.

And one final but vital point. This review was commissioned in order to improve the service in the light of recent events. It has never been part of our task to consider recent or possible future cuts in local government funding. Our review has been entirely independent of any such considerations and is intended to be cost neutral.

Chairman's Summary of Main Recommendations

Governance

Decision-making should be exercised by Local Museum Committees wherever and as much as, possible

There needs to be regular contact between management and the Cabinet member (district as well as County)

Effective political leadership; elected people should make decisions and see that they are carried out, not wait to be told what decisions *have already been made and carried out*

Proper Service Level Agreements are needed saying what each district contributes and what it gets in return

Management

We believe that, along with the collections and buildings, our Museum staff are our greatest assets. They consist overwhelmingly of dedicated and well-motivated people who love the service and, given the chance, could help to make it even better. But we find that the organisation is inadequate to the needs of the service and that the staff and the service would benefit from a new leadership style. Our main recommendations can be summed up as:

The Museum visitor (or Customer) should be the service's main priority.

As one of our members said on the last day of our work, the issue of the needs of the visitor or customer was virtually never addressed in the evidence we heard from management.

Management adopts a much more "can do" attitude at all times.

Revenue raising projects (such as building hire for functions where it doesn't affect normal museum activities) should be enthusiastically embraced rather than resisted.

Meaningful communication and involvement with staff should be an immediate priority.

The over-complicated admission charge system should be simplified and the "headline" charges should be reduced significantly as soon as conditions permit.

Future staff reductions – should they have to occur – should be shared equally throughout the service and its management and not confined solely to an entire, specific group or team, for example.

The Head of Service should meet regularly with the relevant Cabinet member and the new Joint Committee to take guidance on future strategy and policy

The Head of Service should meet regularly with the Chairs and members of the Area Committees to obtain their views on future developments in the relevant museums, rather than inform them of what has been decided.

The more detailed recommendations and the reasons behind them can be found on the following pages.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George Nobbs". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underlining the name.

George Nobbs
Chairman

1. Background

- 1.1 At its meeting on 2 April 2012, Cabinet agreed to commission a review of the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (NMAS) and to appoint a cross party working group chaired by Councillor George Nobbs to undertake this work. The group also comprised the following Members:
- Michael Carttiss
 - Marion Chapman-Allen
 - Graham Jones (until 16 October 2012)
 - Judy Leggett
 - Hilary Thompson
 - Jennifer Toms
- 1.2 At its first meeting on 23 April 2012, the working group agreed its terms of reference, which were endorsed by the Leader of the Council. These are available at Appendix B. The group has met formally on ten occasions and delegations of members have also met with District Councillors in Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Kings Lynn to discuss the involvement of local councillors in the running of the service. We also met with the Chairmen of Breckland Area Museums Committee and North Norfolk Museums Forum. A list of witnesses involved in all of these meetings is available at Appendix C.
- 1.3 In addition to visits to all NMAS museums by members of the working group, there have also been visits by delegations of members to the museums services in Hull, Lincoln and Colchester. Importantly, NMAS staff have also been given the opportunity to give us their views, either in writing or in person, on how the service may be improved. We have made every effort to gather the views of staff but are conscious that, perhaps due to communication problems within the service, some members of staff have still not been made aware of the opportunity to do this. Our findings in respect of the management and marketing of the service are outlined in section two of this report.
- 1.4 We have also dedicated a great deal of our time to looking at the arrangements for governance of the joint museums service and our findings and recommendations for taking forward this issue are to be found in section three of this report.
- 1.5 At the beginning of our inquiry, we made it clear that we wanted to hear the views of the people of Norfolk and in particular those who do not visit museums. An online survey was therefore conducted during September in order to capture these views, with separate questionnaires for people who have visited a NMAS museum and those who have not. Work has also been undertaken by the County Council's Community Engagement team to ascertain why some schools do not make use of the museums service and the findings of both these pieces of work are outlined in section four of our report. We think this is very valuable intelligence and would expect that the Head of Service and County Council Cabinet portfolio holder should give serious consideration to the issues raised by this research.

2. Management, Staffing and Marketing

2.1 Findings

- 2.1.1 Our overall findings are positive in a number of areas and the service provided by the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (NMAS) is highly valued by its users. The service is also a highly valuable resource for schools and students.
- 2.1.2 The collections are excellent and deserve to be seen by more people. The art collection is very good and, although it is very locally orientated, that is a positive thing in terms of serving the people of Norfolk. The Norwich School collection is indeed world-class in terms of a provincial school of painting.
- 2.1.3 Most of the museums buildings are huge assets in themselves and local government in Norfolk is generally very supportive of the service. The service has also been able to secure a lot of grant aid in recent years but this may also be seen as a weakness, as explained in paragraph 2.2.4 below.
- 2.1.4 Overall, staff are very dedicated, self-motivated and enthusiastic. Most staff would not oppose new approaches and want to be more involved in decision-making and initiatives. Many want to meet and interact more with the public. Our curatorial staff are good and are a resource that could be used more in providing services to others.
- 2.1.5 In short the service has four great assets:
- Its collections
 - Its buildings
 - Its staff, especially those on the frontline and those working behind the scenes who are often overlooked
 - Public goodwill in Norfolk

2.2 Management and staffing

- 2.2.1 The lack of clarity around the political governance of the service is highlighted in the following section of this report. This was confirmed to us in interview with the present Head of Service, who said she was unsure of where ultimate decision making rested on all aspects of the service. We are also aware that the museums service (insofar as it forms part of the range of services provided by the County Council) is only a part of Cultural Services, which in itself forms a small part of the much wider Community Services department also responsible for adult social care and community safety. In terms of line management, the Head of Service reports to an Assistant Director and Director who have much wider remits and no experience of managing a museums service. This combination of services is itself of relatively recent origin, having previously been lumped in with Corporate Affairs. We believe that this has resulted in the service developing its own culture and management style to the point that it acts as if it is a self-governing corporation rather than a local government service answerable in the same way as other public services. We therefore recommend that **there needs to be clear accountability between the Head of Service, the Director and Assistant Director of Community Services, the County Council's Cabinet portfolio holder and the Joint Museums Committee, and clarity as to who makes the decisions and on what (Recommendation 1) .**

There should also be regular pre-programmed meetings of the Head of Service with the Cabinet portfolio holder, to include either the Director or Assistant Director of Community Services as appropriate (Recommendation 2)

- 2.2.2 Against this background, we also believe that the management of the service has developed a resistance to what it considers to be outside interference, particularly from members of the Area Museums Committees. This is evidenced by what we consider to be a 'can't do' attitude in respect of ideas for developing and marketing the service, as outlined in the following section.
- 2.2.3 While there is nothing wrong with staff being proud of what they do, we believe it is complacent to regard the whole service as a 'market leader' or 'world class', as senior managers and some staff seem to do. This view wasn't borne out by discussions with managers of other museums services and there would seem to be a great deal of merit in a suggestion from one member of staff that **NMAS staff should have the opportunity to visit and observe good practice in other museums services (Recommendation 3)**
- 2.2.4 We have heard from both the Head and Deputy Head of Service that the principal focus for senior management over the past few years has been pursuing external funding linked to particular projects. While reacting to the availability of funding pots has been successful in improving the fabric of the buildings and facilities such as toilets and kitchenettes, it would seem that there has been no corresponding strategy for improving the service or engaging with local communities. We also believe that project management around the refurbishment of the Bridewell museum was lamentable, with the project being completed a year later than the original schedule.
- 2.2.5 We have found that there is a lack of clarity around the staff structure, including uncertainty about the actual numbers of staff. This information does not appear to be readily available to senior management and it is curious that, while we have been told that there have been cuts in staffing, senior management insist that the overall number of staff seems to have remained the same!
- 2.2.6 We have also heard evidence that some staff feel that management do not always welcome their views and concerns, and that some staff have felt intimidated by management. We have no way of knowing if this is widespread, but we recommend that **when the issue of the management ethos is addressed by the new Head of Service, then some additional work should be undertaken with staff to identify how the whole question of staff representations and/or complaints or consultations with staff could be better handled. (Recommendation 4).**

2.3 Marketing and admissions policy

- 2.3.1 We have found that there is not a coherent marketing strategy for the service and that a number of issues need to be reviewed and clarified. The main ones that we have identified are outlined below.
- 2.3.2 Admission charges are a major feature of policy but they seem to be seen by senior management as a virtue in themselves rather than a necessary evil. In

spite of this, the system of charging is incredibly complex and confusing. For example, the impact of the various arrangements by which visitors can receive free or discounted entry varies from one museum to another. Figures we have been given show that the percentage of visits to Norwich Castle in 2011-12 that were paid for was 63%, while the figure for Gressenhall was 29%. In addition, the percentage of all visits to these museums that were charged at 'Full Adult Price' was 9% for Norwich Castle and 5% for Gressenhall. In addition, membership of a Friends of Museums group may offer more benefits, at less cost, than a museums pass. **The current system of admission charges, including discounts and free entry, therefore needs to be rationalised and simplified (Recommendation 5).**

- 2.3.3 We recognise that the museums service is paid for by the taxpayers of Norfolk (whether they use it or not) and that admission income makes a relatively small contribution to the overall budget. We are also told by management that few people actually pay the full official admission price. For these reasons we feel that the deterrent value of the full admission price outweighs its value as a source of funding and recommend that **the new Head of Service and the new governance bodies explore, as a matter of urgency, the advantages of some element of free admission (even if only at set times or specified periods), together with an overall meaningful reduction in the standard admission charge (Recommendation 6).**
- 2.3.4 We have also been informed of proposals to replace the museum pass with a membership scheme that 'enhances the offer' to subscribers, for example 'behind the scenes' tours or 'Meet the Curator' sessions. We believe that the proposed changes to the museums pass scheme are unnecessarily complex and that the time and effort spent on introducing a new scheme could be better spent on looking at ways to reduce admission prices. We therefore **recommend that these proposals should be reconsidered (Recommendation 7).**
- 2.3.5 On the issue of retail and catering sales, we have heard from senior managers that there is limited scope for improvement on current performance which showed a net profit of nearly £16,000 on retail sales and a loss of about £1,700 on catering in 2011/12. At the same time, we have been told that if grant funding were withdrawn, more resources would have to be concentrated on the service's 'flagship' museums "where there is more opportunity to increase visitor numbers and retail income". The negative view of NMAS managers in this respect does not accord with the findings from our visits to other museums services, as outlined below. We therefore do not accept the prevailing view that little can be done to improve income from retail sales and catering, and recommend that **the new Head of Service and Commercial Manager need to review current performance and options for improving retail and catering income, and discuss ideas with the Area Museums Committees as a matter of priority (Recommendation 8).**
- 2.3.6 We have been told by senior managers that generating income for the service by hiring out NMAS buildings for a variety of functions such as weddings is an aspiration that is being pursued. At the same time, however, we have been told that there are numerous obstacles to being able to realise this aspiration and we have seen no evidence that any meaningful plans are in place to address these. This contrasts starkly with what we found on our visit to Colchester and we can

find no convincing reason why NMAS buildings should not be available for private hire to reduce the cost of the service to Norfolk residents. We believe that there should be a presumption that all NMAS buildings are available for private hire when they are not being otherwise used and we recommend that **the new Head of Service must explore all options for venue hire with the assumption that all buildings should be available for hire (usual usage permitting) unless there are very good reasons to the contrary (Recommendation 9).**

- 2.3.7 Arrangements for opening NMAS museums to the public, including times of the day, days of the week and seasonal variations, are erratic and confusing. Strangers Hall museum is a good example of this. We recommend that **there should be an aspiration that all NMAS museums are open seven days a week throughout the year (Recommendation 10).**
- 2.3.8 Improving signage to Norwich Castle has been a long-standing issue for the Norwich Area Museums Committee, and one that has met with resistance and is yet to be resolved. However, on our visits to the various NMAS museums and in our meetings with staff, it has become clear that signage is a wider issue that needs to be addressed at all the museums, and one that should be targeted at car drivers as well as pedestrians. Improved internal signage at the larger museums, such as to exhibits of national significance at Norwich Castle, also needs to be addressed.
- 2.3.9 While it is positive that there are many school visits to museums, there need to be appropriate arrangements and facilities for teaching, eating lunches etc so that the children and other users can make the most of their visit. This has been highlighted as a particular issue at Norwich Castle but arrangements at all museums that are regularly visited by school groups should be reviewed to ensure that they are appropriate. We therefore recommend that **arrangements and facilities for school visits to museums should be reviewed to ensure that they are fit for purpose in ensuring a positive experience for the children as well as other visitors (Recommendation 11)**
- 2.3.10 We recommend that **the new Head of Service and Commercial Manager should address the following matters as a matter of urgency:**
- Developing a marketing strategy
 - Undertaking a thorough review of charging (including the museums pass), including stating clearly the rationale for any charging structure
 - Highlighting what is best and making the most of the opportunities this brings by making sure people know about it
 - Review the current position on opening hours and see if this can be made more consistent and easily understood
 - Consider opportunities for the excellent behind the scenes staff to interact with the public and ways in which the less visible artefacts the service holds can be more publically available **(Recommendation 12)**

2.4 Visits to other museums services

- 2.4.1 In late July and early August, delegations of working group members visited Hull, Lincoln and Colchester and met with senior managers and, where possible, Cabinet portfolio holders to see what could be learned from other museums

services. Our main findings are outlined below.

- 2.4.2 In terms of clarity of roles and responsibility for decision making, we found a very good professional relationship between the Head of Service and the Cabinet portfolio holder in Hull, with fortnightly meetings between them and regular meetings with other service managers. We found the Cabinet portfolio holder to be very knowledgeable about the service and he is clearly seen as the person who makes the final decisions. In fact, we were told that he is "the boss". In Lincoln, there are also regular meetings between the Head of Service and the Cabinet portfolio holder and there is a clear expectation that the Head of Service is open to challenge regarding service improvement.
- 2.4.3 At Hull, culture is seen as a selling point for tourism by the City Council and customer focus is at the centre of everything the museums service does. Admission to museums is free and they are all open seven days a week. Staff receive training in customer service skills, front of house staff are welcoming and there are welcome signs in eight languages. A museums guide 'app' for mobile phones is also being planned. There is also a sense of 'ownership' by both staff and visitors. For example, visitors are encouraged to 'adopt a painting' to fund conservation work. Customer focus was also in evidence at Lincoln, for example the dedicated area for parents and young children at the 'Collection' museum. This area had initially been designed as a shop but staff soon decided that it was in the wrong place and made a virtue of necessity. An excellent piece of initiative!
- 2.4.4 We also found good examples of 'can do' attitudes and a business-like approach during these visits. At Hull, for example, a positive attitude is something that is recruited for in new staff. The Head of Service had ready access to a whole range of management information on staffing and budgets and a Commercial Manager in post on a three-year contract had increased the profit margin on retail sales from 20% to 50%. The museums education service had also managed to fill a large part of the gap created by lost national funding through local sponsorship. At Lincoln, the restaurant at the 'Collection' museum in the city centre is commercially run and opens at night as well as during the day. Lincoln Castle is not used as a museum but is hired out for functions such as period re-enactments. Colchester and Ipswich museums service has a very well-developed and comprehensive policy for hiring out its buildings for various functions, including Colchester Castle which is similar to Norwich Castle.

2.5 Meetings with members of staff

- 2.5.1 A letter was sent to all NMAS staff on 11 September offering them the opportunity to meet with members of the working group either individually or with colleagues to ensure that members "understand the current successes, challenges and opportunities of the service". To date, meetings had been held with thirty-six members of staff, in addition to those we spoke to during our various visits. We are sorry to learn that not all members of staff received our letter. The 'high level' findings from these meetings were that staff were happy to be working in a museums service and motivated to do a good job. However, this did not necessarily mean that they were happy with every aspect of their particular jobs.
- 2.5.2 One of the areas for improvement identified by staff during these meetings was a lack of communication from management and the misunderstandings and

frustration that this can cause. Some staff felt that there is a “void” between senior management and frontline staff and a lack of understanding about how decisions are made. Consultations with staff are also seen by some as senior management paying lip service to involving staff in decision making.

- 2.5.3 The move to shared support services has also caused some frustration for staff in terms of what is seen as a lack of a timely response in the areas of human resources and ICT services. For example, the NMAS website was thought to be good but it was felt that the change to an ICT shared service had led to delays in updating it. We also received negative comments about the slowness of response caused by inadequate equipment or networks.
- 2.5.4 In terms of support for change or ideas for improvement, we found that those staff who spoke to us were generally supportive of a more commercial approach such as venue hire and online purchasing. However, some staff feel frustrated by limitations on what they are allowed to do and not being able to use their full potential. There was support for the idea of staff being able to shadow each other or share roles and for ‘behind the scenes’ staff having more opportunity to meet members of the public. Backroom staff such as curators are a huge asset to the service but the new Head of Service must make better use of their professional skills and enthusiasm by involving them more directly with the public. This would include refreshing exhibits more frequently and enabling the public to view items in the collection that they would not normally be able to see.

2.6 Challenges for the future

- 2.6.1 We are aware that the present Head of Service has announced her intention to retire in April 2013 and believe that it would be foolhardy not use this change in leadership as an opportunity to review managerial structure and roles to ensure there is an appropriate balance between management and the rest of the service.
- 2.6.2 We would like to see a fundamental change in the culture of the service so that there are very clear lines of accountability and responsibility, a strong customer focus and a consistent ‘can do’ attitude. We therefore want to see a management team which:
- Consistently demonstrates a ‘can do’ attitude
 - Is open and receptive to challenge
 - Is keen to grasp opportunities and, where possible, create them
 - Has a business-like approach to everything it does
 - Strives for continual improvement and is able to demonstrate this through benchmarking
 - Is strategic in its approach to service improvement - e.g. chasing money to deliver a strategy, not just having a strategy to chase money.
- 2.6.3 Service improvement must be at the heart of the job description for the new Head of Service and we envisage that, in order to take the service forward, the person appointed should be able to demonstrate the following skills and experience:
- Proven management and leadership skills
 - Experience of leading a professional service, but not necessarily a museums service
 - Proven entrepreneurial flair
 - Experience of managing a comparable organisation

- Experience of working in the private sector would be desirable

2.6.4 We see merit in identifying and learning from the experience of a high performing museums service to achieve:

- A clear and appropriate staffing structure
- An open, listening and responsive Management ethos
- Clarity on budgets, responsibility and accountabilities
- Improved communications with and between staff
- An emphasis on building staff morale
- The correct balance of front line staff to management

We therefore recommend that **before a new Head of Service is appointed, consideration should be given to the merit of employing an experienced and successful leader from another museums service to advise on the above (Recommendation 13).**

3. Current governance arrangements

3.1 Joint Museums Agreement

Central to the governance of the joint museums service is the Joint Museums Agreement, which has been revised periodically since the service was created in 1974, well before the introduction of the Cabinet system in local government. The current version is therefore the fourth and was signed in July 2006. Although it was only intended to remain in force until March 2010, there is a clause that it should continue thereafter unless any of the Councils gives each of the other Councils twelve months notice of its intention not to continue the agreement. There are a number of areas in which this agreement does not correspond to current practice and these are outlined in remainder of this section.

3.2 Joint Museums Committee

3.2.1 The current Joint Agreement spells out the role of the Joint Museums Committee as:

- Monitoring the effective operation of NMAS within the available budget
- Advising all Council's on the strategic framework for museums and archaeology in Norfolk
- Acting as a forum for developing future strategy
- Agreeing policies for NMAS in accordance with national and local guidelines
- Agreeing the service plan in the light of the available annual budget

3.2.2 In practice, there are different views as to what the function of the Joint Committee is or should be, including providing scrutiny of decisions made by Area Museums Committees, enabling the County Council to have an overview of what the Area Museums Committees are doing, and providing a forum for sharing best practice.

3.2.3 There is a requirement in the Joint Museums Agreement that the chairman of the Joint Museums Committee must be a member of the County Council and provision that this would normally be the Council's Cabinet portfolio holder for Cultural Services. In addition, the chairman and vice-chairman of the Joint Museums

Committee are ex-officio non-voting members of each Area Museums Committee. The County Council's Cabinet portfolio holder for Cultural Services therefore used to attend meetings of all the Area Museums Committees to make a link with the Joint Committee but this is no longer the case. There is therefore a widely held view that there is less of a connection than in the past between the Area Museums Committees, the Joint Committee and the County Council Cabinet portfolio holder for Cultural Services, and that the impact of the Joint Committee has declined.

3.3 Area Museums Committees

3.3.1 According to the current Joint Museums Agreement, the role of Area Museums Committees is to:

- Provide a detailed view of local museums and archaeology issues
- Agree a local service plan within available budget and county-wide service plan
- Advise on the terms of any Service Level Agreement with NMAS
- Monitor the local Service Level Agreement
- Recommend proposals to the Joint Committee e.g. museum development projects
- Agree an area museum strategy within the context of an approved NMAS strategy as far as possible to be consistent with and complementary to all other relevant strategies e.g. heritage, leisure, tourism, arts, economic development.

3.3.2 In 2010, both North Norfolk District Council and Great Yarmouth Borough Council dissolved their Area Museums Committees and replaced them with local arrangements. In North Norfolk, these consisted of the creation of a Museums Forum that includes representatives of local independent museums and heritage organisations, of which there are many. In Great Yarmouth, arrangements were made for the Area Museums Manager to report periodically to the Council's Scrutiny Committee on the activities of the museums service in the area, and for the Joint Museums Committee to receive relevant extracts from that Committee's minutes. While the achievement of financial savings featured prominently in these decisions, the view that the Area Museums Committees were ineffectual also played a part. We understand, however, that the present administration is looking to reinstate its Area Museums Committee.

3.3.3 From the evidence we have received, none of the remaining three Area Museums Committees fulfils the roles ascribed to them in the Joint Museums Agreement and arrangements vary between one Council and another for agreeing agendas and involving local Members. While there are differing views on whether there should be a consistent model for Area Committees or flexibility to reflect local differences, there is a widely-held view that they were only informed of decisions that had already been taken or events that had already happened, and that they should have a stronger advisory role in respect of decisions yet to be made. In Norwich, there is also a strong view that there needs to be more involvement of local people and businesses to foster a sense of 'local ownership' of the service.

3.3.4 There is also a widely held view that local Members should have greater control over the content of displays and themes for exhibitions and events. However, Area Museum Committee members frequently feel marginalised and that their views are not valued. This was variously characterised by 'everything is under

control', 'leave it to the experts' or 'can't do' responses from service managers to suggestions from local councillors. These Members took the view that the involvement and influence of District councillors in the running of local museums had virtually disappeared in recent years, including the extent to which Area Museums Committees are consulted about service developments.

3.4 Service Level Agreements

- 3.4.1 The current Joint Agreement specifies that “the Joint Committee and the Area Committees shall be guided by the Mission Statement and Key Objectives agreed by the Joint Committee and the Area Committees and set out in the Service Level Agreements between the County Council and each District to be agreed annually or less regularly if agreed by the County Council and the relevant District Council.” These agreements should outline the details of the services to be delivered by each museum and services delivered countywide. Outline terms for a service agreement are annexed at Schedule 2 of the Joint Agreement.
- 3.4.2 It is not clear whether or not Service Level Agreements were initially negotiated with each District but the only current agreements are with North Norfolk District Council and the Borough of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk. The key targets in these agreements relate to the NMAS Service Plan which is agreed annually by the Joint Museums Committee.

3.5 Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service Board

- 3.5.1 The current Joint Museums Committee introduced a new NMAS Service Board to provide the Head of Service with support in managing the budget and the County Council's contribution to it. At a Member level, this Board was to consist of the County Council's Cabinet portfolio holder for the service, the chairman of the Joint Museums Committee (if different from the Cabinet portfolio holder) and the vice-chairman of the Joint Museums Committee. The Board met periodically between April 2004 and April 2010.

3.6 Funding

- 3.6.1 The Joint Agreement includes an agreement for the District Councils “to endeavour to provide financial and other contributions to NMAS” but does not stipulate the level or nature of such contributions. However, Schedule 2 of the Agreement specifies that the financial and other contributions provided by the County Council and the relevant District to enable the delivery of museums services should be set out in the Service Level Agreement with that District. In practice, there are significant disparities in the financial contributions made by the District Councils, as shown in the table below.

3.6.2 Revenue and Project Contributions for 2012/13:

Council	Budget Contribution
Breckland	0
Broadland	0
Great Yarmouth	£42,400
Kings Lynn & West Norfolk	£35,500
North Norfolk	£40,500
Norwich City*	£14,000
South Norfolk	0
Norfolk County Council	£3,753,000

****See paragraph 3.6.3 for details of the City Council's total contribution***

- 3.6.3 In addition to its contribution to the revenue budget, there is an agreement between NMAS, Norfolk County Council and Norwich City Council entitled the 'Division of Responsibility for Building Maintenance of Jointly Operated (Museums) Buildings in Norwich'. In accordance with this agreement, the City Council paid £100,832 in 2011/12, not including the cost of officer time in surveying, procuring and coordinating building works. Other contributions to building maintenance costs in 2011/12 were £1,784 from Great Yarmouth Borough Council and £517 from Breckland District Council.

3.7 Member involvement within the County Council

- 3.7.1 As part of our evidence gathering on governance arrangements, we interviewed a former County Council Cabinet portfolio holder for Cultural Services, Councillor James Carswell. His view was that current arrangements do not offer sufficient opportunity for elected Members at either a District or County level to challenge and scrutinise decisions affecting the museums service. In his experience, Cultural Services are overshadowed by issues concerning adult social care at the County Council's Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel and there had never been a significant debate about any aspect of the museums service. Mr Carswell thought that there is a need to ensure that Cultural Services are properly scrutinised within the County Council and that service managers are given the opportunity to showcase their work to Members. He therefore suggested that there should be separate meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel to look into Cultural Services. Mr Carswell also recommended that the County Council's Cabinet portfolio holder for Cultural Services should meet or communicate regularly with his or her counterparts in the Districts and have an input into the role of Area Museums Committees. He also saw a need for a debate about how much power could be given to Area Committees and the Joint Committee. As a general rule, he thought that decisions affecting local museums should be taken by Area Museums Committees, with the Joint Committee performing a scrutiny function.
- 3.7.2 Mr Carswell thought that senior managers of the museums service were accomplished professionals but they did not always seem to understand the role of elected Members in the governance of the service. There had been a lack of appropriate and consistent communication from them concerning significant events such as the theft of valuable artefacts and he often had to rely on the relevant Assistant Director to keep himself informed of events. Mr Carswell thought that

senior managers needed to be less defensive and to understand that challenge and scrutiny are not 'personal attacks'. There also needed to be clear written advice as to when they should be informing the Cabinet portfolio holder and other key individuals about significant events. It was important for elected Members to receive such information before others such as the media or staff, as there could be issues concerning democratic accountability or confidentiality.

3.8 Conclusions and recommendations on governance arrangements

- 3.8.1 The joint museums service often seems to be regarded as an exclusively County Council service rather than a partnership. This seems at least partly due to a lack of clarity or understanding regarding the County Council's role and the extent of its powers in the governance, as opposed to the management of the service. In fact there is a lack of clarity around the remits and responsibilities of the Area Museums Committees, the Joint Museums Committee, the County Council's Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel and its Cabinet portfolio holder for Cultural Services.
- 3.8.2 The growing professionalisation of the service, combined with the impact of the Cabinet system of local government, has left the Joint Museums Committee and the Area Museums Committees without a clear and meaningful role and where service managers take decisions without Member challenge.
- 3.8.3 Although not shared by all of our witnesses so far, there is a view that there needs to be more local decision making to reflect the fact that NMAS is a joint service and not a County Council service and that, with the exception of Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse, the museums and most of their collections are owned by the District Councils in whose area they are situated.
- 3.8.4 Current practice no longer reflects the letter or spirit of the Joint Museums Agreement, which is in need of urgent review (**Recommendation 14**). The future agreement should spell out meaningful roles for the Joint Museums Committee and the Area Museums Committees. There needs to be a decision on the extent of decision-making that could be delegated to these committees. Suggestions of matters over which there could be more local control have included opening up museums to a wider audience by increasing awareness of what is available and using various means to reduce admission charges and fund special events.
- 3.8.5 We were tempted to recommend the abolition of the Joint Museums Committee but realise that this is probably a step too far. We therefore recommend the creation of a new Joint Museums Committee to act as the body to which the head of the museums service is answerable and which ensures the service is accountable to elected Members. The committee would be charged with overseeing service delivery and providing strategic leadership for the service across the whole of Norfolk. (**Recommendation 15**).
- 3.8.6 The new Joint Museums Committee should be much smaller than currently and we can see advantages and disadvantages in each of the following two models of composition:
- The relevant Cabinet portfolio holder for museums from the County Council and each of the District Councils, plus the Chairman of each of the new Area Museums Committees in Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Kings Lynn.

- Seven representatives of the County Council (one of whom will be the Cabinet portfolio holder) and at least seven District councillors drawn from those areas with museums, the proportions to be agreed by negotiation, and usually drawn from the District museums committees.

We see value in having a separate Heritage Forum in which previously co-opted members of the Joint Museums Committee meet separately and regularly with others in the field of heritage, tourism and culture with the Chairmen of Area Museums Committees and Area Museums Managers. The same is recommended for districts. **(Recommendation 16)**

As with all our proposals, the choice of model for the new Joint Museums Committee would be subject to consultation with and agreement of the District Councils.

- 3.8.7 Before the creation of a joint museums service, Norwich City Council, Great Yarmouth Borough Council and the Borough of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk ran their own museums services. We recommend that these councils have restored to them the right to make decisions on local matters in line with the principle that any decision that can be made locally should be **(Recommendation 17)**. This would be best achieved by the creation of smaller, more focused Area Museums Committees consisting of not less than five, or more than seven, members who have been elected within the District concerned as either District or County councillors, irrespective of party political considerations, but with the majority being District councillors. Where the decisions of such committees have additional funding implications beyond what is included in the service level agreement, these should be met by the District council either directly or by arranging outside funding **(Recommendation 18)**. A current example of such practice is funding provided by the Borough of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk to cover free admission to Lynn museum for part of the year.
- 3.8.8 There should be Service Level Agreements detailing the respective responsibilities of each District Council and Norfolk County Council, the financial and other contributions of the District Council to the local museums service and what they receive in return. **(Recommendation 19)** To ensure that the disparity in the level of financial contributions between District Councils is addressed in these agreements, there needs to be a debate about how best to ensure that contributions are based on a rational funding formula rather than historical precedence. **(Recommendation 20)**
- 3.8.9 Reporting and decision making at the County Council's Community Services Overview & Scrutiny Panel concerning the museums service and Cultural Services in general seems to be scarce and buried in wider reports concerning the Community Services department as a whole. We recommend that **there should be dedicated meetings of this Panel for the consideration of the budget, performance and development of Cultural Services (Recommendation 21)**

4. Views of Norfolk residents and schools.

4.1 This section outlines the findings of work undertaken by the County Council's Community Engagement team to ascertain the views of Norfolk residents and why some schools do not make use of the museums service.

4.2 Online survey for Norfolk residents

4.2.1 To gather the views of residents on what makes a good museum 1704 museum users and 204 non-users were surveyed in September 2012. Visitors rated Norfolk museums well for things to see and do with 91% saying this was either good or very good. Respondents felt that collections were presented in an appealing way (91%), that the museum they visited helped increase understanding about the area (90%) and that what there was to see and do was relevant to them (87%).

4.2.2 Satisfaction levels are high, with 94% reporting they were very satisfied or fairly satisfied with their visit, compared to 3% that were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. When compared to museums outside of Norfolk our museums fared well with 67% saying they were better or the same for value for money, 88% helpfulness of staff and 72% appeal of the collections.

4.2.3 Residents who had not recently visited a museum were also asked their views on what makes a good museum and 204 responses were received. The two main reasons that people reported for not visiting a museum were cost of the day out, tickets, food, travel (48%) and that they had not thought about it (40%). The factors listed as being important to non-visitors were placed in a slightly different order to those reported by recent visitors, with cost of entry (93%), interesting buildings or collections (88%) and cost of transport/eating out (77%) being the most mentioned. Non-visitors were also asked an open question, asking them to say what would encourage them to visit a museum. Some consistent themes emerged including special offers / reduced ticket / free entry, more publicity / information and special events.

4.3 School visits to museums

4.3.1 In addition, eight teachers with responsibility for educational visits from schools in the vicinity of two museums, Gressenhall near Dereham and Time and Tide in Great Yarmouth were interviewed by telephone. Norfolk Museums Service runs a full range of educational and learning opportunities in all its museums, with individual museums running different educational programmes depending on their size and nature of their collections. The majority of their work is with primary schools for Key Stages 1 and 2. Teachers were clear about the benefits for pupils of visiting a museum, commenting on how they responded differently in an alternative environment, to the point that they almost "don't realise that they are learning" and gained much from the sensory experience. Some pupils, particularly those from more deprived backgrounds, have never visited a museum before.

4.3.2 The most important factor determining which museum a school visits is whether it is considered to be relevant to the curriculum. Interviewees felt that it was important that museums recognise this and respond as far as possible. The key barrier identified by every teacher was cost. Although entrance to museums is free to

Norfolk schools, museums do charge for half and full day educational programmes – charges are fixed on a cost recovery basis. The cost of transport was a particular area of concern and schools were very clear that they can't always rely on contributions from parents for their visits.

4.3.3 Interviewees were also asked about museum outreach services. This is where museum staff deliver educational opportunities in schools, for example loaning artefacts or visiting schools to deliver education programmes to children. Teachers who had used this service spoke positively about it and felt it a good way to help keep costs down. However, most teachers said they would prefer to go to a museum. Teachers were positive about online access to museum collections and all felt that the collections would be far more likely to engage children if they were interactive.

4.3.4 One key finding was that, when those interviewed were asked if they felt informed about their local museum's educational offer, the majority of teachers told us they did not feel informed. Most recognised that it can be difficult to ensure information reaches the right teacher. This is an area that the service needs to give further consideration to so that schools can benefit from the full range of support, information and advice that is on offer to them, but that is not currently being fully utilised. Finally, most teachers felt their local museum was good value for money. However they found it more difficult to compare the value for money of NMAS museums with that offered by other museums or attractions run by the voluntary or private sector.

Our Recommendations

Management, Staffing and Marketing

Recommendation 1

There needs to be clear accountability between the Head of Service, the Director and Assistant Director of Community Services, the County Council's Cabinet portfolio holder and the Joint Museums Committee, and clarity as to who makes the decisions and on what.

Recommendation 2

There should also be regular pre-programmed meetings of the Head of Service with the Cabinet portfolio holder, to include either the Director or Assistant Director of Community Services as appropriate

Recommendation 3

NMAS staff should have the opportunity to visit and observe good practice in other museums services.

Recommendation 4

When the issue of the management ethos is addressed by the new Head of Service, then some additional work should be undertaken with staff to identify how the whole question of staff representations and/or complaints or consultations with staff could be better handled.

Recommendation 5

The current system of admission charges, including discounts and free entry, needs to be rationalised and simplified.

Recommendation 6

The new Head of Service and the new governance bodies should explore, as a matter of urgency, the advantages of some element of free admission (even if only at set times or specified periods), together with an overall meaningful reduction in the standard admission charge.

Recommendation 7

Proposals concerning the replacement of the current museums pass scheme with an enhanced membership scheme should be reconsidered.

Recommendation 8

The new Head of Service and Commercial Manager need to review current performance and options for improving retail and catering income, and discuss ideas with the Area Museums Committees as a matter of priority.

Recommendation 9

The new Head of Service must explore all options for venue hire with the assumption that all buildings should be available for hire (usual usage permitting) unless there are very good reasons to the contrary.

Recommendation 10

There should be an aspiration that all NMAS museums are open seven days a week throughout the year.

Recommendation 11

Arrangements and facilities for school visits to museums should be reviewed to ensure that they are fit for purpose in ensuring a positive experience for the children as well as other visitors.

Recommendation 12

As a matter of urgency, the new Head of Service and Commercial Manager should address the issues outlined in paragraph 2.3.10 of this report.

Recommendation 13

Before a new Head of Service is appointed, consideration should be given to the merit of employing an experienced and successful leader from another museums service to advise on the issues outlined in paragraph 2.6.4 of this report.

Governance arrangements

Recommendation 14

Current practice no longer reflects the letter or spirit of the Joint Museums Agreement, which is in need of urgent review.

Recommendation 15

A new Joint Museums Committee should be created to act as the body to which the Head of the Joint Museums Service is answerable and which ensures the service is accountable to elected Members. The committee would be charged with overseeing service delivery and providing strategic leadership for the service across the whole of Norfolk.

Recommendation 16

The new Joint Museums Committee should be much smaller than currently and we can see advantages and disadvantages in each of the following two models of composition:

- The relevant Cabinet portfolio holder for museums from the County Council and each of the District Councils, plus the Chairman of each of the new Area Museums Committees in Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Kings Lynn.
- Seven representatives of the County Council (one of whom will be the Cabinet portfolio holder for cultural services) and at least seven District councillors drawn from those areas with NMAS museums, the proportions to be agreed by negotiation, and usually drawn from the District museums committees.

We see value in having a separate Heritage Forum in which previously co-opted members of the Joint Museums Committee meet separately and regularly with others in the field of heritage, tourism and culture with the Chairmen of Area Museums Committees and Area Museums Managers. The same is recommended for districts.

Recommendation 17

Those authorities which, before the agreement had their own independent museums services, (i.e. Norwich City Council, Great Yarmouth Borough Council and the Borough of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk) should have restored to them the right to make decisions on local matters in line with the principle that any decision that can be made locally should be. This would be best achieved by the creation of smaller, focused Area Museums Committees consisting of not less than five, or more than seven, members who have been

elected within the District concerned as either District or County councillors, irrespective of party political considerations, but with the majority being District councillors. The Breckland Area Museums Committee and North Norfolk Museums Forum should remain unchanged.

Recommendation 18

Smaller, focused Area Museums Committees should be created, consisting of not less than five, or more than seven, members who have been elected within the District concerned as either District or County councillors, irrespective of party political considerations, but with the majority being District councillors. Where the decisions of such committees have additional funding implications beyond what is included in the Service Level Agreement (see recommendation 19), it will be up to the District council to come up with the money either directly or by arranging alternative outside funding in the form of grants or sponsorship, for example, or from their own resources.

Recommendation 19

There should be Service Level Agreements detailing the respective responsibilities of each District Council and Norfolk County Council, the financial and other contributions of each District Council to the local museums service and what they receive in return.

Recommendation 20

To ensure that the disparity in the level of financial contributions between District Councils is addressed in these agreements, there should be a debate about how best to ensure that contributions are based on a rational funding formula rather than historical precedence. The imbalance between Norwich's building maintenance contributions and other districts is one example.

Recommendation 21

There should be dedicated meetings of the County Council's Community Services Overview & Scrutiny Panel for the consideration of the budget, performance and development of Cultural Services.

Norfolk Museums Service Working Group

Terms of Reference

<p>Membership of working group</p> <p>Michael Carttiss Marion Chapman-Allen Graham Jones (until 16 October 2012) Judy Leggett George Nobbs (Chairman) Hilary Thompson Jennifer Toms</p> <p>Officers</p> <p>Keith Cogdell, Scrutiny Support Manager Colin Sewell, Planning, Performance and Partnerships Manager Tim Shaw, Committee Officer</p>
<p>Reasons for scrutiny</p> <p>The current business model may not be sustainable given current and foreseeable financial constraints on local government. The Joint Museums Agreement is also due for renewal and this provides the opportunity to evaluate the current arrangements, including governance, monitoring, reporting and funding, to ensure they are fit for purpose.</p>
<p>Purpose and objectives</p> <p>To consider and make appropriate recommendations concerning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ethos and core values of the Museums Service • Governance arrangements • Management and structure • Admissions policy • Publicity and promotion • Security • Finance
<p>People and organisations to consult with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The people of Norfolk/ the general public • Museums Service staff • Museums volunteers • Museum visitors including schools • Friends of the museums • Museums pass holders • District Councils in their capacity as partners in the Joint Museums Agreement • National Trust (as owners of the Elizabethan House Museum, Great Yarmouth) • Trustees of the Royal Norfolk Regiment collection • East Anglia Art Fund • Heritage Lottery Fund • Art Fund

- Arts Council England
- Contemporary Arts Society
- Costume and Textile Association
- Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

Background documents

- Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service Plan 2012-15
- Joint Museums Agreement
- Commercial options matrix
- Museums Service options appraisal – Report to Joint Museums & Archaeology Committee on 13 January 2012
- Priority based budget report

Style and approach

- Panel-style meetings with witnesses
- Museum visits
- Various means of consultation, as appropriate – letters, questionnaires, email, internet, social media

Deadline

Report to Cabinet in October 2012

List of Witnesses

Appendix C

Brenda Arthur - Leader of Norwich City Council

David Bradford - Norwich City Councillor & Chairman of the Norwich Area Museums Committee

Lindsay Brette - North Norfolk District Councillor and member of North Norfolk Museums Forum and Norfolk Joint Museums and Archaeology Committee

James Carswell – former Cabinet portfolio holder for Cultural Services, Norfolk County Council

Barry Coleman - Gt. Yarmouth Borough Councillor and former Leader of the Borough Council

Phillip Duigan - Breckland District Councillor, County Councillor, Chairman of Breckland Area Museums Committee and member of Norfolk Joint Museums Committee

Alison Gifford - Chairman of Kings Lynn Civic Society

Robin Hanley – Western Area Museums Manager, Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service

Rachel Kirk - Norwich Museums Manager, Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service

John Knights – Vice-Chairman of the Friends of Norwich Museums

Elizabeth Nockolds - Kings Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council Cabinet portfolio holder for Shared Services and External Relations and Chairman of West Norfolk Area Museums Committee.

John Perrott – Business and Development Manager, Norfolk County Council Community Services

Rory Quinn – former Chairman of Norwich Area Museums Committee and Vice Chairman of Norfolk Joint Museums Committee

Bill Seaman – Assistant Head of the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service

James Steward - Eastern Area Museums Manager, Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service

Barry Stone – Norfolk County Council Cabinet portfolio holder for Cultural Services, Customer Services and Communications

Vanessa Trevelyan – Head of Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service

Andy Tyler - Kings Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Councillor, member of West Norfolk Area Museums Committee and Labour Group spokesperson for culture

Charles Wilde – Central Services Manager, Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service

Bernard Williamson - Former Chairman of the Great Yarmouth Borough Council Scrutiny Committee

Appendix D

Chairman's summary of the background to the Joint Museums Agreement.

We came to this review believing that Norfolk people held our local museums in high regard. We also felt, as councillors, that there was some considerable vagueness about how they were currently run and (from a democratic point of view) by whom.

In making our recommendations, we are very aware that we have been charged with this task by the Cabinet of *Norfolk County Council* and that we are ourselves County Councillors. Any proposals, however, will require the agreement of each of the district councils, as well as the County Council. Indeed, we would not want it any other way because returning more governance to the district councils is at the very heart of our recommendations.

For that reason, our suggestions are intended to redress the balance in favour of those

partners who originally made the Joint Museums Agreement back in 1974. We are also very aware that in making these recommendations we are specifically concerned with the issue of *local government* involvement, the effectiveness of *democratic accountability*, and *the scrutiny of a publicly funded service*. It is essential in these times that such a service should be strategically led by, and answerable to, those who have been elected locally.

That's why we are not making any recommendations that affect the various very valuable bodies and organisations (of which the *Friends of Norwich Museums*, *East Anglian Art Fund* and *Norfolk Contemporary Art Society* are examples) that support the museums service in various areas – except in reference to their participation in heritage forums.

Our object as far as this report is concerned is to make suggestions about *local authority governance* and management only. The role of voluntary bodies – and volunteers - will need to be addressed more fully at a later date.

In making our recommendations, we have been concerned about the decline in effective democratic accountability in recent years and the need to address it. It might be useful, however, to look at some of the contributing factors.

When the joint agreement was signed in 1974, it coincided with the drastic changes in the structure of local government that saw the sweeping away of centuries of self-rule for ancient cities and towns. However, whilst libraries were transferred to County control, the new Act left museums as a district function. Norfolk County Council at that time operated only one museum of its own, the tiny one at Walsingham – which it divested itself of soon afterwards.

What Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Kings Lynn did was to enter into a Joint Agreement with the County (and the other new districts) that was to be renewed every 3 years. At the time, with the director of Norwich's museums becoming the new head of the service, it looked for all intents and purposes as if the City had taken over the County. However, that was not the case. Thirty-eight years later, the coincidence of the date 1974 has led to an assumption by many that legal responsibility for museums passed to the County Council at that time. That also was not the case. It emphatically did not!

The original agreement provided for a central committee of up to 33 members but no local committees. The first revision set up a local committee for Norwich (but nowhere else) and slightly reduced the size of the Joint Committee. Later revisions set up "Areas Committees" but with few powers – and those that they did have were soon whittled away. Things might have carried on without mishap had it not been for the introduction of the Cabinet system in recent years. This imposed a structure of a County Cabinet member and seven district Cabinet members on top of the Joint and Area Committees.

Cabinet members brought with them Review Panels and these too were added to the structure of governance. One by one, the Area Committees were abolished or ceased to meet until only a couple remained and the ultimate blow was the removal of any effective budgetary function from the Joint Museums Committee. It is not surprising then that the abortive attempt to transfer the museums service into a Trust got so far as it did without elected councillors apparently being aware of it.

Recent events have highlighted the problem of senior management being theoretically answerable to a host of competing bodies and individuals whose function, area of competence and even continued existence was in doubt. Too often this has meant that in

practical terms, far from being accountable to too many bodies, senior management were *effectively* accountable to none. This has been the fault of the governance structure and we mean to address it.

Committees barely exist in local government today but we still have them in relation to our museums in Norfolk as a legacy of that agreement of 1974. Therefore, we need to make them work effectively. We have concluded that it is not just desirable as a matter of principle that, (as far as possible), decision making be returned to accountable local museum committees but that it will lead to much more effective management and leadership in the service. We are recommending smaller, leaner executive style committees for the three partners who historically had their own museums services. We believe that all should be elected from within the relevant district council area and that a simple majority should be appointed from and by the district council itself, and the remainder from and by the County Council. This will provide balance but retain local accountability and decision making. Our recommendation addresses the financial implications of this.

As for a county-wide Joint Committee, we have, as you will see, two alternatives. However, as one of our members said, "it is not the exact composition that matters so much as the fact that there is a body that the museums service is expected to answer to - and does".

One of our suggestions fully embraces the Cabinet system and seeks to make it work effectively while keeping full local representation, and the other - perhaps less radical - which nonetheless retains the County/District balance. Either, we believe would provide a more decisive decision making body.

Further, we recommend that meaningful Service Level Agreements be instituted with those districts which have museums within their borders.

We believe that the issue of effective governance has drifted for too long. It is essential, if we are to continue providing these valuable services – as we all wish to do - that they are truly accountable to the people who not only have to pay for them but who actually own them!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George Nobbs". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font. The first name "George" is written in a larger, more prominent script, and "Nobbs" follows in a similar but slightly smaller script. There is a horizontal line under the "s" in "Nobbs".

George Nobbs
Chairman