

POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

25 JUNE 2020

NATIONAL CIVIL WAR CENTRE ADMISSION POLICY POST COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To propose an amendment to the Admission Policy for the NCWC as part of the recovery plan following the COVID-19 lockdown.

2.0 Background Information

2.1 The COVID-19 crisis is having and will continue to have a significant impact on the local community. The most vulnerable are likely to be shielded for a significant period, with little opportunity for social interaction, whilst many other local residents will be experiencing financial difficulties through job loss, furlough or loss of business and many more will be struggling with mental health issues as a result of the lockdown.

2.2 Lockdown has also had a major impact on both the high street and on tourism and the visitor economy nationally and businesses will now need to adapt and provide a safe, welcoming environment to encourage residents (short term) and tourists (medium to long term) to return. It will be vital to drive footfall to the town to begin the process of unlocking the local and visitor economy.

2.3 There is a great opportunity for culture to play a role in re-building our local communities and the town centre. The DCMS's 2016 Culture White Paper demonstrates the value of culture in three ways:

- intrinsic value, positively impacting personal well-being and life-satisfaction
- social value, measured in improved clinical outcomes for health and wellbeing, improved educational attainment and increased community cohesion leading to safer, stronger communities
- Economic value, measured through tourism and the visitor economy

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/culture-white-paper>

Therefore it can be demonstrated that the value of NCWC and indeed the whole Heritage & Culture Business Unit, including the theatre and Newark Castle, is best seen in the context of improved outcomes for residents of Newark & Sherwood – supporting community plan objectives of enhanced, sustainable town centres, rebuilding the visitor economy, improved health and mental well-being, increased participation and removing barriers to social mobility.

2.4 Emerging data from an audience research report on NCWC suggests that a disproportionate number of visitors are from the least deprived areas. The report further highlights that the admission fee is perceived by some to be a barrier to entry. At least 50% of visitors are tourists, however it is likely that footfall from this group will be reduced until the tourism industry has begun to recover from the impact of COVID-19, therefore it is important to encourage local, repeat footfall in the short term, generating positive PR and word of mouth for the centre.

During the period of closure, the Heritage & Culture Business Unit has re-shaped its service delivery to focus on remote and digital engagement and participation, developing resources linked to the school curriculum and offering a variety of activities, targeting and increasing different audiences, including:

- Educational resources working in partnership with local schools
- Home-learning support for families
- Projects and activities linked to improving mental health and well-being
- Content for under-5s to support working parents
- Participatory activities for older and isolated people
- Participatory activities for people with disabilities, working in particular with My Sight and Autism group

Just last month, learning and participation-focussed social media posts reached 50,000 people, and the website pages were accessed over 2000 times.

In addition to the work being created by the team, they have sought out and published online cultural content such as live streaming of shows and plays and are working in collaboration with others such as Nottingham Castle. They have encouraged participation through two key projects – Knit a Battlefield and Patchwork Palace, both of which will lead to a display of work co-created by the local community, and are consulting with schools to understand how to monetise a digital schools offer.

There is now a unique opportunity to utilise this increased digital participation to encourage new visitors to the NCWC.

3.0 Proposals

- 3.1 In preparing to re-open, it has become clear that COVID-secure measures will have an impact on the NCWC offer. Entry will be limited to a fixed number at periods throughout the day, and visitors will be expected to follow a pre-determined route through the museum to avoid cross-over which would not comply with social distancing. Aspects of the Centre will need alteration – from closure of the cinema and top floor galleries and removal of the dressing up area, to removal of interactives.
- 3.2 Further, although this is unknown at present, it is possible that the demographic of people most likely to visit may change from older couples and grandparents with children. New audiences may include families struggling to entertain children who have not returned to a school or kids' club setting, or young couples who would perhaps usually travel or holiday abroad or spend their leisure time on activities that may still be restricted (gigs and festivals for example). These new audiences may require a different approach to encourage them to visit. Some of these potential new audiences may also be experiencing financial difficulties from the impact of COVID-19, and many are likely to be experiencing mental health and well-being difficulties.
- 3.3 Therefore, to support and encourage as wide a range of N&S residents as possible to visit the NCWC and engage with a positive, cultural experience in a safe, controlled environment, whilst acknowledging the limitations of this revised offer, it is proposed to remove the admission fee for residents and introduce a reduced admission fee for external (tourism) visitors. This policy would be in place until the end of August 2020, in alignment with other chargeable council assets such as car parks.

- 3.4 Encouraging residents to visit the NCWC will bring footfall to the town centre and will support efforts to restart the local economy, whilst helping to ensure that visitors are spread more widely across the town by providing key facilities. A vibrant, well-visited museum will support future income generation in other parts of the business unit such as the café and paid-for activity such as tours, workshops and commercial hire. In the longer term it will also support the rebuilding of the visitor economy, particularly as it is known that many overnight visitors to the town stay with residents, meaning that a positive reputation amongst the local community is essential.
- 3.5 Across the country, heritage and cultural institutions are struggling to survive the COVID-19 lockdown and some may be unable to re-open due to lack of funding. It is unknown at this stage what the national cultural picture is likely to be, so it is more important than ever to widen our local audience base and offer a local cultural service with plenty of potential for repeat visits and future income generation.

4.0 Equalities Implications

- 4.1 Removal of the admission price will ensure that all residents have equal access to the cultural services being provided by their local authority and may encourage those residents who previously felt intimidated or indeed alienated by the subject matter to drop in and sample it for themselves. With the impact of COVID-19 being felt across all demographics, it is important to offer cultural outlets to support mental health and well-being, continue to support family learning, particularly for those in deprived areas who may have struggled with a technological solution through lockdown and welcome and encourage the community as they explore the 'new normal'.
- 4.2 It is acknowledged that free entry in itself will not solve the socio-demographic divide in the museum's visitors, but can be used with targeted marketing to encourage and support access.

5.0 Financial Implications (FIN20-21/417)

- 5.1 Overall, COVID-19 and the lockdown will have an impact on the income generation potential for 2020/21, which is in part being mitigated through staff furlough and limiting expenditure to essential costs. The Annual admission income is approx. £70,000 – with around 50% of that figure being tourist trade. Key to the business unit's future recovery in the short to medium term is in positive word of mouth and repeat visits from within the district and this is best achieved in these unprecedented times by encouraging as many people as possible to take their first steps back to normality within our walls. Dependent on the continued relaxation of lockdown it may be possible to improve the income position this year through the re-opening of the café and eventually offering additional, paid-for activities such as workshops, tours and the reinstatement of commercial hire, which will only be possible if footfall is already well-established within the museum.
- 5.2 The proposed two month period of free entry as at paragraph 3.3 would mean a loss of income equating to £5,833.

6.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives

This amendment supports community plan objectives: enhanced, sustainable town centres, rebuilding the visitor economy, improved health and mental well-being, increased participation, and removing barriers to social mobility.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS that:

- (a) the NCWC offers free admission to residents for a maximum two month period (covering July and August 2020) to support the rebuilding of our local community, increase footfall to the town in a controlled manner to support the local economy and to offer cultural services which are proven to be of benefit in supporting residents' mental health and well-being;**
- (b) the NCWC offers a reduced admission price to external (tourism) visitors which reflects the reduced and altered offer whilst still providing a valuable visit and supports the longer term rebuilding of the visitor economy; and**
- (c) a further report be brought to the Economic Development Committee in due course relating to the findings from the Audience Research report and the measured outcomes of this policy change through the summer, to support strategic future planning for the sustainable delivery of Heritage and Cultural services.**

Reason for Recommendations

To support the recovery of the Heritage and Culture business unit by encouraging footfall and new audiences and to support recovery of the Town Centre economy and tourism.

Background Papers

Nil.

For further information please contact Carys Coulton-Jones on 01636 655773

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