

## **Report to the Cabinet**

**Report reference:** C-044-2011/12  
**Date of meeting:** 5 December 2011



**Portfolio:** Leisure and Wellbeing  
**Subject:** Lowewood Museum, Hoddesdon  
**Responsible Officer:** Tony O'Connor (01992 716882 ).  
**Democratic Services Officer:** Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

- (1) That Cabinet agrees to the Council entering into a five year service level agreement with Broxbourne Borough Council, to manage Lowewood Museum in Hoddesdon.**
- (2) That Cabinet agrees to a change in the public opening hours of the Epping Forest District Museum in order for the District Museum Service to accommodate the management of Lowewood Museum as from 1 February 2012**

### **Executive Summary:**

The District Council has been approached by Broxbourne Borough Council with a proposal that Epping Forest Museum Service undertakes future management and operation of Museum Services provided from Lowewood Museum, Hoddesdon, as from 1 February 2012.

The timeframe for this coincides with the retirement of existing members of staff at the Lowewood Museum and the approach is based on the excellent reputation that Epping Forest Museum has in the area and across the region, in terms of its temporary and touring exhibitions programme, collections care and education outreach service.

Shared service delivery across the two authorities would realise opportunities for both partners; enabling Broxbourne to benefit from the expertise and skills of the District Council Museum team and providing EFDC with access to wider external funding opportunities. It would also enable the Council to realise revenue savings for the period of the agreement, through allocation of a management fee of around £10,000 and shared use of resources. In addition, the shared delivery of service would enable opportunities for staff development and skills enhancement.

In order to harmonise the opening times between the two museums and make best use of current EFDC staff resources, it is proposed to alter the opening hours of the District Museum (as laid out in the Appendix). These changes to the District Museum's opening times have additionally been arrived at following a period of visitor analysis and as such it is not expected that the level of visitor satisfaction will decrease as a result.

If Cabinet agrees to this proposal, Epping Forest District Council would enter into a five year service level agreement with Broxbourne Borough Council linked to Section 113 of the Local Government Act 1972, which would be reviewable by both parties after three years.

### **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

- The proposed shared service arrangement with Broxbourne Borough Council would enable the District council to realise a revenue saving of around £10,000 per annum for the period of the agreement.
- Further benefits would be realised through the increased opportunities to access external funding for projects across the two local authority areas.
- The partnership would enable a range of staff development opportunities.
- A joint service will be able to draw on the combined collections of both museums to provide services and will provide a more attractive opportunity for marketing.

### **Other Options for Action:**

Remain with existing arrangement for Epping Forest Museum Service

### **Report:**

1. The District Council has been approached by Broxbourne Borough Council with a proposal that Epping Forest Museum Service undertakes future management and operation of Museum Services provided from Lowewood Museum, Hoddesdon, as from 1 February 2012.
2. This proposal has arisen due to the region-wide reputation of Epping Forest District Museum Service as being an excellent service. It is seen by Broxbourne Borough Council as a solution to address the forthcoming retirement of existing staff at Lowewood Museum and as an opportunity for the borough to develop and expand its current service provision utilising the expertise and skills of Epping Forest staff.
3. The District Council will also benefit significantly from a range of new opportunities generated by a shared service and these include the potential to access and secure wider external funding for projects combining the two Museums and an opportunity to realise revenue savings of around £10,000 through shared resources and a management fee for delivery of the Broxbourne service. Additionally, both museum services being boundary neighbours share a local history and can therefore attract new audiences and user groups.
4. An integrated service would also more effective having a more flexible response to changes in demand. It would significantly benefit customer care and increase delivery of outreach services to school and educational colleges, and create a more effective exhibition resource drawing on the collections held by both Museums.
5. Visitor figures have been improving steadily in recent years at the District Museum and this has been as a result of new displays, a highly regarded events programme and improved marketing. A larger service could avoid future visitor stagnation and boost numbers with delivery of service improvements with additional customer focused exhibitions, new events and activities for children of all ages. Some of the service improvements will generate increased income to the Council. A larger service may indeed attract additional support from the private sector, grant funding bodies and individuals.
6. The District Museum also already works in partnership with a range of cultural attractions within the Epping Forest District and the Borough of Broxbourne and plays a lead

role in the joint promotion of the cluster of organisations which lie on either side of the River Lee (The Royal Gunpowder Mills, Copped Hall, Waltham Abbey Church, The Abbey Gardens). This new arrangement would strengthen the combined tourism marketing potential for the area at time when the Lee Valley White Water Centre will be offering increased opportunities to attract visitors to the area.

7. The Lowewood Museum building itself also presents a range of opportunities for development and wider service delivery, which could lead to increased income generation on behalf of the District Council.

8. The risks associated with entering into an agreement in respect of Lowewood Museum are minimal, as maintenance of the museum building infrastructure and running costs would remain with Broxbourne Council. Epping Forest District Museum Service would effectively be working to a “labour only” contract, with Broxbourne Borough Council responsible for ensuring suitable insurance cover for the building, equipment, exhibitions and Museum collection. The Borough of Broxbourne would additionally retain legal ownership of the borough’s museum collection. The responsibilities of both parties will be clearly laid out in the Service Level Agreement and Epping Forest District Council reserves the right to terminate the agreement if those undertakings from Broxbourne Borough Council are not met.

9. If Cabinet agrees to the establishment of this shared service arrangement, the District Council’s responsibilities in relation to Lowewood Museum will be underpinned by a Service Level Agreement with Broxbourne, linked to Section 113 of the Local Government Act 1972. The extent of these responsibilities as detailed within the Appendix to this report.

10. The service level contract would initially be for a period of five years, with a review after three years to allow withdrawal if either party feels that involvement has not been successful. However if the shared service is judged successful by both parties, there would be an option to extend for a further five years.

#### **Resource Implications:**

Within existing resources. The current budget for Lowewood Museum will be managed by Epping Forest District Museum. The shared service arrangement would enable the District Council to realise a revenue saving of around £10,000.

#### **Legal and Governance Implications:**

None. Governance for Lowewood Museum and its collections will remain with the Borough of Broxbourne.

#### **Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

None.

#### **Consultation Undertaken:**

Discussion with Officers at Broxbourne and Epping Forest District Council  
Discussion with the Committee of the Friends of Lowewood Museum  
Advice from EFDC Human resources  
Consultation with EFDM staff and Trade Unions

**Background Papers:**

Service Delivery Specifications (Broxbourne Borough Council)  
Service Delivery Method (Epping Forest District Museum)

**Impact Assessments:**

Risk Management

Low Risk to Epping Forest District Council.

Equality and Diversity:

*Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications?* No

*Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken?* Yes

*What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?*  
N/A

*How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?*  
N/A