Gallery Oldham and Oldham Library Sunday Opening

Report of the Executive Director, People, Communities & Society

Portfolio Responsibility: Heritage Libraries and Art

Cabinet

10 June 2009

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Gallery Oldham and Oldham Library Sunday Opening

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PEOPLE, COMMUNITIES AND SOCIETY

PORTFOLIO, HERITAGE, LIBRARIES AND ARTS

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To advise cabinet of the costs, practical implications and benefits of opening Gallery Oldham and Oldham Library on Sundays and seek approval, and funding, for Sunday opening of these facilities.

2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 Since the opening of Gallery Oldham in 2002 and Oldham Library & Lifelong Learning Centre in 2006 public access to services on Sundays has been limited. Gallery Oldham has a strong regional profile and attracts many visitors from outside the borough. Demand for access to learning resources and people’s network computers at Oldham Library is high throughout the week. The regular opening of both Gallery Oldham and Oldham Library on Sundays will increase access to leisure and cultural services and support the development of the town centre as a safe, vibrant and accessible place to visit. This report outlines the costs and implications associated with extending access to cultural services on Sundays.

3.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

3.1 That approval is given and funding identified to open Gallery Oldham, Tourist Information Centre and Oldham Library on Sundays.

Gallery Oldham and Oldham Library Sunday Opening

4.0 INTRODUCTION or BACKGROUND

4.1 There are currently in excess of 600,000 visits made per annum to the Cultural Quarter.
4.2 There is evidence of demand for the gallery to be open on Sundays (mostly in the form of visitor comments and letters). This is mostly from people outside Oldham who have travelled to Oldham to view an exhibition and been disappointed to find the gallery shut. There is demand, particularly from families living within Oldham, for the gallery to be open on bank holidays and it can be assumed that this audience would also appreciate and benefit from services and facilities being available on Sundays.

4.3 There is considerable pressure on the Express Library due to the small number of computers and resources available when the main library is closed. Most Sundays a waiting list is in operation. In an attempt to alleviate this the Express Library has been re-arranged recently (since Friday 1st May) to accommodate 2 additional computers and the online catalogue.

4.4 The recent announcement that a Metrolink extension will routed via Oldham Town Centre will benefit the cultural quarter by bringing more visitors from out of town to the Gallery, possibly via a tram stop on Union Street directly outside the facilities concerned, and improving connections between cultural quarter and other parts of Oldham.

4.5 In 2008, in an attempt to create greater efficiencies, Oldham Tourist Information Centre was relocated to Gallery Oldham. The TIC is operating successfully from the main reception and maintaining its high standards of customer care. The TIC will also benefit from Sunday opening and the Metrolink extension.

4.6 Opportunities to provide a café facility in Gallery Oldham are currently being explored. There is demand for this from visitors and indeed an expectation that facilities of this scale and quality should have a café. There is now sufficient market information (visitor numbers and profile, and usage patterns) to make this an attractive proposition to a commercial operator. Opportunities to use a café facility to support the healthy eating agenda and local food production are also being explored. Sunday opening would further enhance the income potential for the Council from the café.

4.7 A revised vision for Phase 3 of the Cultural Quarter is currently under development. This aims to provide a combined museum, local studies and archive facility in the old library and art gallery building, increase public access to collections and services, secure and bring back into the public domain a prominent listed building, and release both the museum and 84 Union Street for development or disposal. Phase 3 will add considerable value to the existing cultural quarter offer and will benefit from Sunday opening.

4.8 Sunday opening of cultural quarter facilities, and in due course the provision of a café and development of Phase 3 of the cultural quarter, will produce a vibrant, accessible selection of cultural services and make a major contribution to the regeneration of the town centre.

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5.0 CURRENT POSITION

5.1 The current open times for cultural quarter services are

- Gallery Oldham & TIC: Monday to Saturday 10.00 am - 4.45 pm (including bank holidays)
- Oldham Library (whole facility) Monday to Thursday 9.00 am - 7.00 pm, Friday 9.00 am - 5.00 pm and Saturday 9.00 am - 4.00 pm
- Oldham Library (Express Library only) Monday to Thursday 7.00 pm - 9.30 pm and Sunday 11.00 am - 3.00 pm
- Oldham Lifelong Learning Centre Monday to Thursday 9.00 am – 9.30 pm, Friday 9.00 am - 5.00 pm and Saturday 9.00 am – 4.00 pm

6.0 OPTIONS/ALTERNATIVES

6.1 Three options for Sunday opening of facilities have been considered.

6.2 Option 1: To Gallery Oldham, TIC and Express Library 10.00 am – 4.00 pm.

Two additional hours of operation will help to alleviate current pressure on the Express Library, however, Sunday opening of the gallery might increase demand further for library facilities particularly from families and young people. A significant increase in the number of visitors on site could also create site security difficulties.

This option would cost the Council £65,702.

6.3 Option 2: To open Gallery Oldham, TIC and the ground floor of library 10.00 am - 4.00 pm

This option will cater better for a significant rise in demand for library services by providing access to all computers and books on the ground floor including audio visual material and talking books. However, The Reference and Information section and children’s and young people’s library facilities based on the upper floor will remain closed.

Depending on the effectiveness of the security solution devised to block access to staircases this option could create site security issues. Access to the prayer facilities, toilets and the performance space may also need to be restricted.

This option will cost the council £104,338 plus an additional estimated one off-cost of £1,000 - £1,5000 for effective barriers to restrict access via the staircases to the upper floor of the library.

6.4 Option 3: To open Gallery Oldham, TIC and whole library 10.00 am - 4.00 pm
The options provides the full range of facilities and services for all ages and is the easiest to manage in terms of site security as access to the staircases do not need to be controlled. Due to PFI arrangements the Council is charged according to the amount of floorspace which is in use. This option enables the Lifelong Learning half of the building can be more easily secured and for Lifelong Learning to pilot family and adult learning activities in the library area.

This option will cost the Council £108,275

7.0 PREFERRED OPTION

7.1 Option 3, to open Gallery Oldham, TIC and the whole library 10.00-4.00pm is the preferred option and this provides a full range of resources and services for all ages, is easier to manage in terms of site security, and provides best value for money by maximising use of available space.

8.0 CONSULTATION

8.1 The main issues resulting from a survey of express library users were the need to reduce waiting times for computers and offer longer periods of computer usage. Both of these issues would be addressed by opening up more of the library space. Most users surveyed found the Sunday access to the library convenient.

8.2 Oldham Lifelong Learning Service (OLLS) have been consulted regarding the demand for access to their services on Sunday. OLLS would like to use Sunday opening of the gallery and library to pilot and evaluate a range of learning activities in the library area prior to incurring any additional expenditure for opening the Lifelong Learning half of the building.

9.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The cost for the Sunday opening are as follows: details attached.
Option 1 will cost the Council £65,702
Option 2 will cost the council £104,338 plus an additional estimated one off-cost of £1,000-£1,5000 for effective barriers to restrict access via the staircases to the upper floor of the library.
Option 3 will cost the Council £108,275
Currently there is no funding within existing revenue budget. Hence additional funds will have to be identified. (Karsan Kerai)

10.0 HUMAN RESOURCES COMMENTS

10.1 HR have been consulted on the proposals and will ensure that these are implemented in
line with the Council's policies and procedures. (Emma Gilmartin)

11.0 LEGAL SERVICES’ COMMENTS
None

12.0 IT IMPLICATIONS

12.1 ICT provision at Oldham Library, including public access computers, is supported by the PFI contract with Allied Worldwide who provide a ICT technician during open hours. The network, telephony and Internet connections are supported by Unity ICT. It is not intended to make arrangements with Unity for extended cover over the weekend period so there is an element of risk to these services. Having said that, there is no support cover with Unity for the existing Saturday service, which hasn’t caused any issues in the past. (Trevor Slade)

13.0 PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 The only property implications would be in relation to the additional operational costs resulting from the proposed extended opening hours of the building, full details of which are outlined in the report. (Miles Anderson)

14.0 ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

14.1 Sites will be staffed and managed by Council personnel and all standard policies and procedures will be followed.

15.0 COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 17 OF THE ACT)

15.1 Gallery Oldham, Oldham Library and Oldham Lifelong Learning Service are inclusive and welcoming to all ages and all sections of the community. Gallery Oldham uses the borough’s collections and resources to raise awareness of and promote understanding of different cultures, histories and experiences and provides opportunities to explore contemporary issues in a safe environment. Increasing access to learning resources and social opportunities for groups at risk of exclusion and positive activities for young people out of school hours will support community cohesion and community safety.

16.0 FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE

16.1 KEY DECISION:- NO.
If YES:-
17.0 SUPPORTING PAPERS
None

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