

**SUMMARY REPORT TO ACCOMPANY ACE APPLICATION
RESPONSES TO A PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A CHARITABLE COMPANY
LIMITED BY GUARENTEE TO DELIVER ARTS AND HERITAGE SERVICES**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hampshire County Council, Southampton City Council and Winchester City Council set out to discover the level of support with Hampshire audiences for the Fully Integrated Merger (FIM) of their Arts, Museums and Heritage services. Surveys, focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted with audiences and stakeholders across Hampshire.

Museums, Arts and Heritage Services are perceived to be under threat in the current financial climate. As a means of combating this threat, audiences and stakeholders are broadly prepared to go along with the Trust proposal, if the professionals recommend it. The greater their stake in the service, however, the more concerns voiced by Public and Stakeholders. Although they are prepared to support the Trust proposal, stakeholders and users want more detail and tangible reassurance that the system can be made to work on the following issues:

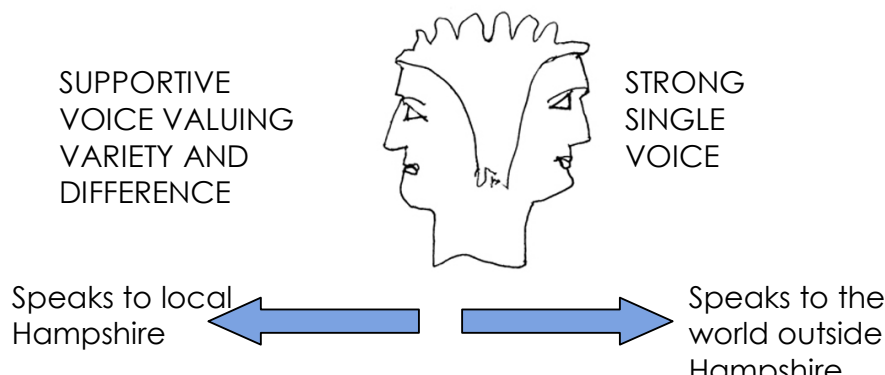
- Local voices, venues and identity will be lost
- Old rivalries will wreck the system
- Professionals will have the required management, leadership & enterprise competencies

Audiences and stakeholders share similar hopes:

- Positive pooling and sharing of resources
- Dramatically better marketing and IT

While everyone would like to see the quality and scope of the service improved, it is only the professional stakeholders and sophisticated Arts and Museums visitors who hold a realistic ambition what could be achieved under the new system. The majority simply want to hang onto what they've got.

The vocabulary of merger – integrate, combine, single cultural voice – does not motivate the public - it suggests cuts. People want to hear a more positive vocabulary – support, protection, cross fertilisation, energy. The idea is to strengthen arts and heritage variety and identity across Hampshire. Careful use of language will be critical in confirming public support as shown by the diagram below.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Current Situation

In the context of a difficult funding climate, three authorities are exploring the desirability of a Fully Integrated Merger (FIM) for their Museums/Arts/Heritage (M/A/H) services namely Hampshire County Council, Southampton City Council and Winchester City Council. The merged body would take the form of a Charitable Trust. The purpose of the study during Summer 2012 was to assess the level of support for the Trust proposal amongst Hampshire audiences and stakeholders.

1.2 Aims

To guide Council decision-makers as they make a decision whether or not to progress the Trust proposal and in addition to test the following amongst audiences and stakeholders

- To understand current levels of satisfaction with M/A/H services
- To investigate spontaneous responses to the Trust proposal
- To assess its strengths and weaknesses
- To evaluate the level of public support

1.3 Methodology

This was a multi-stranded study, employing:

- A self-completion survey with venue users, County-wide.
- A self-completion survey with external stakeholders, County-wide.
- Interviewer administered survey with non-visitors.
- Focus groups with M/A/H users (Aldershot, Winchester, Gosport, New Milton)
- Focus Groups with stakeholders at Winchester and Southampton.
- On-site interviews at Sea City and Milestones.
- Telephone interviews with external stakeholders.

The audience sample was demographically broad based and comparable with the 2008 Government Place Survey. It included a Rural/Urban split and visitors with disabilities. External stakeholders were selected from a list, provided by the Project Team and interviewing took place between June to August 2012.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE FINDINGS - AUDIENCES

2.1 Current Levels of Audience Satisfaction

Who are our audiences

%	Visitors*	Non-visitors
Male	35	40
Female	65	60
16-24	6	15
25-44	27	35
45-64	42	27
65+	25	22
With children	28	30
Without children	72	70

**re-percentage to take account of non-responses*

The table above is the profile of visitors and non-users who filled out the self completion survey. Visitors in the focus groups were segmented as follows in terms of their motivation for visiting: Sophisticated (more frequent users), Visit with children, Visit without children, Not sophisticated (less frequent users) as well as by their motivation for visiting arts and heritage venues.

How audiences feel about the current service

Survey participants (self-selecting) were frequent visitors to Council venues, with a third (32%) visiting once a month or more. A further 46% had visited in the past year and took a serious interest in plans for the integrated M/A/H service. Satisfaction ratings with the current service were good, with 71% of audiences expressing satisfaction - Stakeholder satisfaction was found to be similar to audiences. In-depth interviewing suggests that many people value the preservation of their history (and by implication their local identity), without necessarily planning to visit museums and other venues.

%	Visitors	Stakeholders
Very satisfied	34	31
Fairly satisfied	37	44
Neutral	12	18
Fairly dissatisfied	2	1
Very dissatisfied	1	0
Don't know	13	5

Among non visitors, two-thirds thought it enriched daily life and only 2% thought it was unnecessary or a waste of money. Paradoxically then, Hampshire residents may be satisfied with the service, even if they don't visit themselves. Arts visitors were more engaged, passionate even, and made more regular use of the services available.

Current strengths and scope for improvement

Council-run venues scored well on providing basic services. In contrast commercial M/A/H services typically offered a more comfortable, up to the minute, enjoyable experience. The age group 16-24's in particular valued a modern up-to-date approach, which inevitably involved IT and social networking. Website, advertising and marketing were all targets for improvement, and in addition, visitors had a great appetite for more interesting days out. Arts events require a different state of mind. Arts goers are looking for variety and pace. They want exhibitions, events and performers to be regularly 'rotated'.

2.2 Audience Responses to the Trust Proposal

On balance, well over half of the Hampshire audience are likely to support the Trust without challenge, if it is the Council's recommendation. An important group to target are older regular users (age 45+) who are suspicious of losing out, are anti-change, and don't feel they know enough yet to support the move. Some engaged service users are wary and reserving judgement until they know more. The Councils' will need to put the argument to them in a way which deals transparently with their concerns.

Museums and Heritage audiences are thinking more about protecting what they have already, rather than bringing in improvements. Arts goers, by contrast, see change as a route to higher quality exhibitions and performances. Only a tiny minority understood the legal advantages of a Charitable Trust, such as access to wider funding streams.

Strengths and weaknesses associated with the Trust proposal

Perceived strengths of the Trust were identified as: financially sound, better marketing, one stop website, pooling and sharing of resources, united management = one voice, innovative and energised. This is balanced by the perceived potential weaknesses: financially unsound, weak management, infighting, conflicts of interest, blurring of local identity, loss of jobs and venues, dull product.

What visitors believe could happen

Visitors believe that the three Councils could successfully pool their resources and make them more widely available across the county. With focus and investment in IT, the new Trust could undertake better marketing and advertising of current venues and services - this is sorely needed. Visitors are less inclined to believe that the new Trust will be well managed and well led, nor can they be sure the financial questions have been put to bed. They are pretty sure there will be infighting, with the three authorities unable to put aside their old loyalties. Inevitably, there will be losses but the hope is they will be confined to 'back room functions'. The big fear is loss of local identity, with smaller venues and the North Hampshire named as being more at risk. Speaking with one voice, suggests that smaller voices may be drowned out and local venues lost.

The hoped for advantages which FIM will deliver

Maintaining free admission is a widespread hope amongst regular visitors, followed by a desire for more high quality content and support ie more of the same. Younger people (16-44) favour websites, modern thinking and better links to other sectors.

3. OVERVIEW OF THE FINDINGS - STAKEHOLDERS

3.1 Current Levels of Stakeholder Satisfaction

Overall stakeholder satisfaction with current services was reasonably high and in line with audiences – see page 3. The current negative financial climate provided an expectation that further diminution of resources was in the offing, on top of cuts suffered within the past few years. External stakeholders offered a view on the strengths and weaknesses of the M/A/H services. The key strengths were similar to those perceived by the public though the stakeholders put more of a premium on free entry and staff knowledge and guidance. Weaknesses that stakeholders mentioned were the loss of specialist staff knowledge, lack of publicity and reduced access hours.

3.2 Initial Responses to the Proposal

Several interviewed stakeholders were well aware of the Trust proposal in outline before the interview started. Many suggested the time was ripe, or even overdue, for action on this issue as, without any action, they sensed inevitable decline. Even those who are sceptical or worried can see the logic behind the arguments. In large measure, their concerns are about implementation. The wider sample of stakeholders was asked if they felt the plan made sense and whilst half reserved judgement until they knew more, those who thought it made sense (44%) far out-numbered those who did not (5%); these stakeholders were marginally more positive about the plan than the public sample.

Amongst the much smaller sample of high profile stakeholders (18) who were interviewed in detail four basic types of response were discovered as that of being supportive, sceptical, indifferent and worried. In conclusion, the Trust proposal has more appeal to 'top-down' organisations than to 'bottom-up' ones. While the possible benefits can be appreciated; the bottom-up organisation feared losses. The proposed Trust is seen by all as 'difficult' with a predominating strand in the response – 'can they make this work?'

The opportunities associated with the FIM proposal

The wider sample of stakeholders was 'alive' to the possible opportunities or benefits arising from the Trust than the public, particularly with regard to some of the more aspirational elements like quality shows and a fresh approach to culture.

%	Stakeholders	Public
Venues that are free stay free	60	64
More support for small community museums	45	42
More big 'must see' quality shows and exhibitions	55	39
More opportunities to learn	45	40
More 'what's on' information	45	38
Longer opening/evening hours	36	28
Improvements to services overall	44	27
Fresh modern approach to culture	43	27

The interviewed sample of stakeholders assessed the advantages as described in the introductory statement. 'Better marketing' and 'pooled resources and expertise' resonated well as potential gains. Stakeholders closely connected with museums, galleries and academic disciplines could see opportunities for an improved quality offering. The opportunity to bid for more funding at a national level was noted by 'supportive' stakeholders but questioned by those of a more 'sceptical' bent. More cost-effective use of resources and some gains in educational outreach were also seen by some stakeholders as potential benefits but there was little support for the notion of speaking with 'a single strong cultural voice for Hampshire.

Stakeholder concerns associated with the FIM proposal

When talking to the higher profile stakeholders six broad areas of concern emerged from the discussion, all of which carried significant weight and were as follows:

- Concerns about a Trust in itself
- lack of accountability
- quality of leadership
- effective implementation
- lack of natural cohesion
- loss of local identity

The wider sample of stakeholders had a slightly different range of concerns. Whilst they too were concerned about the loss of local identity and possible weaknesses of governance and arguments among the participating bodies, they also raised worries about possible reduced future funding, and the loss of staff, both quantity and quality of jobs and expertise.

In conclusion, there are several concerns about the Trust, despite the cautious overall support for it. Many concerns arise from a lack of detailed knowledge and from general doubts about the success of any administrative re-organisations. Some stakeholders recommend learning from other charitable trusts in the country or other service sectors. Some concerns stem the way in which the Trust proposal is currently communicated in terms of vocabulary and tone of voice - it arouses suspicions of modern 'too good to be true' management-speak.

4. CONCLUSIONS – AUDIENCES & STAKEHOLDERS

4.1. Support to carry through the proposal and set up the Trust

In the current climate there is no outright hostility to this proposal and a fair measure of support for the idea that 'something must be done.' Founding Authorities will need to address, the concerns raised through the consultation. in order to get audiences and stakeholders fully on board and supportive. Communication of more detailed proposals when the time is right may well address many structural concerns.

The most important group to target are the more traditional, locally-minded, smaller-scale stakeholders who currently perceive they may have more to lose than to gain. The case for the Trust may be more palatable to them if it focussed more on the protection of existing loved resources than on the expansion into grand schemes. The Trust needs convey more about 'mutual support in order to maintain local quality' than 'a merger to make Hampshire culture's mark on the world.' With audiences, an important group to target are older regular users (age 45+) who are suspicious of losing out, are anti-change, and could be vocal if they are not given information to support the proposal.

4.2. Communications about the Trust

In conclusion the proposals are not seen as revolutionary, game-changing or especially controversial. Both audiences and stakeholders see as many risks as they do opportunities – but the risks are more salient. Much depends on how the Trust proposals are presented and understood or raises concerns about the conventional disadvantages of 'administrative' change.

The language of 'integrate / combine / no duplication / single cultural voice' leads to thoughts about 'merger' which in turn leads to the language of 'rationalisation / cutting the outlying branches / job cuts / over-weaning bureaucracy / expensive new HQ'. What audiences and stakeholders desired more was 'protection, mutual support, specific local support, continuity, cross-fertilisation, new energy, updating.' There needs to be great care and precision in the vocabulary of change.

The threshold for being effective in 21st century is perceived to have been raised: there is demand from audiences and stakeholders to see better marketing, more integrated IT and better quality, varied exhibitions. Public-facing (as opposed to fund-raising) stakeholders do not want to create a Hampshire-wide brand or voice, but would rather see the Trust as an under-pinning (in the background) body. If this perception were achieved, it would ameliorate the concerns about loss of identity and lack of cohesion of the area / participants.