

Libraries, Museum and Gallery Briefing 4

The William Morris Gallery and Vestry House Museum Budget Growth, Staffing and Opening Hours

April 2008

Overview

This briefing covers:

- The effect of budget growth
- Staff changes
- Opening hours

Background

On 28 February 2008 the council agreed growth in the budget for William Morris Gallery and Vestry House Museum from April 2008:

- An annual increase of £98,000 for more staff, educational resources, and exhibitions and collections management
- £35,000 to support the council's application to the Heritage Lottery Fund to extend and enhance the gallery

During 2007/08 a joint staffing structure for William Morris Gallery and Vestry House Museum was created. The new staffing structure is now in place, with the positions being filled by a combination of new and existing staff. (See Briefing 3 and Factsheet 2, both issued in December 2007.)

Management of William Morris Gallery and nearby Vestry House Museum have laid the basis of a staffing structure for a sustainable service. The new structure adds much needed expertise and releases resources to develop the gallery and museum as visitor attractions and accessible research resources for Waltham Forest residents as well as visitors from afar.

It had been the council's plan for the future to seek additional funding to build on the new staffing structure for William Morris Gallery and Vestry House Museum. However, we needed to show our full support for the Gallery and Museum to demonstrate clearly to the Heritage Lottery Fund that the council was committed to the long term future of the Gallery and the Museum as community resources and visitor attractions.

Thanks to the recent budget growth starting this financial year, the William Morris Gallery and Vestry House Museum will have more staff and will be open soon to the



general public for more hours during the week. Staff are also looking at a new schedule for bank holiday weekends, when the gallery and museum have previously been closed.

Staffing

Has the council used budget growth to appoint a new curator?

- The council has not used any of the £98,000 budget growth to appoint a curator. A joint manager of William Morris Gallery and Vestry House Museum was appointed before the budget increase as part of a planned staff restructure.

- The new manager has a professional museum background and experience in fundraising and audience development - key areas of expertise we have lacked. Traditional 'curatorial duties', ie research, interpretation and care of the collections will be the focus of the Collections and Exhibitions Officers in both WMG and VHM.

Why did you not keep the curator you had?

- The former curator (Keeper) of the William Morris Gallery, who was also responsible for its day-to-day running, chose not to apply for any of the new posts created by restructuring, even where on a higher grade.

Could the former curator have written the Heritage Lottery Fund bid and saved £35,000?

- The budget increase of £35,000 for 2008/09 is necessary to complete the HLF application for funds to expand and enhance the William Morris Gallery. Professional expertise, not normally held within the council, is required to make a successful bid to the HLF. It has nothing to do with the changes in the staffing structure or the role of a curator.

- Applications of this type have to be prepared in a manner and to a standard that require skills beyond those of either a curator or a manager. They require more than knowledge of the collection, having a view on the gallery's future use and benefits to the wider community, and the ability to 'fill in' an application form. We anticipate that the £35,000 will be used to pay for an experienced bid writer to collate information and write the bid, liaise with the park project team and to cover the costs of specialist reports, eg a conservation management plan, and architectural and building survey advice on this Grade II listed building. Even if the staffing structure had remained as it was this expertise would have to have been bought in.

If the former curator was available to give tours is it necessary to pay for guides?

- In previous years the curator only gave a handful of tours each year. We have started to work with two Blue Badge guides to ensure we can provide a regular tour programme for the William Morris Gallery. By working with experienced Blue Badge guides, who are familiar with the collections at the gallery and at other related sites in and around London, we are aiming to develop this service for groups who will pay for the tours and thus cover the costs of the Blue Badge guide. However, this does not preclude our own staff delivering specific tours; indeed our Learning and Outreach Officer gives tours each week for local schools and other groups.



What new staff will the budget increase pay for?

- The budget enables us to extend the post of Learning and Outreach Officer to become a year round post, rather than a term-time only post. An Exhibitions and Collections Officer and Assistant will be added to the staff. Hours of the Visitor Support Assistants will be increased at William Morris Gallery and Vestry House Museum.
- Furthermore, this additional funding pays for investment in the improvement of permanent displays, remedial conservation work and the development of additional educational resources. All these help the staff do their job better and make the collections more accessible and enjoyable.

Why should William Morris Gallery be subject to Value for Money concerns?

- Local authority museums are non-statutory services paid for out of local council tax. Many of our residents are on low income. All residents deserve a gallery that welcomes them, widens their horizons and gives good value for money. It is the job of the council, working with its partners, to ensure additional funding continues to be raised to conserve and develop the collections and the facilities.

Does Value for Money mean services will be degraded?

- Quality is not sacrificed. The new opening hours reflect the times most visitors say they prefer to visit. Hours during the week have been reduced so we can open for longer at weekends when most people have free time. Weekday hours during school holidays have been extended.
- Specialists are valued. We have recently recruited experienced professionals as a Museum and Gallery Manager, an Exhibitions and Collections Officer, and a Learning and Outreach Officer to work with existing staff, who have their own expertise. A member of the gallery and museum team was a conservation specialist for over 12 years at a national museum. New staff are now developing an electronic catalogue of the collection, which will enable information about it to be more widely accessible and support effective collections management. Future appointments will add to the body of expertise.

Opening hours

When is the William Morris Gallery open?

- William Morris Gallery is open to the general public for 4 hours on both Thursday and Friday afternoons and for 7 hours each day on Saturday and Sunday. Tuesday and Wednesday are reserved for bookings by schools, which are a priority for the council, and other groups of visitors. In common with many other museums of its size and type, William Morris Gallery is closed to visitors one day a week – Monday.
- The current opening hours are therefore 22 hours per week, or 26 hours per week in school holidays. This compares with 31.5 hours per week before the changes. However, the figure of 22 hours per week does not take into account the additional access provided under the new arrangements for schools and other groups outside of the general public opening hours. The gallery is open to visits from schools and other groups for a total additional 16 hours each week outside of general gallery opening hours.



Why did William Morris Gallery not open for Easter Monday and William Morris's birthday this year?

- William Morris Gallery was closed this Easter Monday, which coincided with William Morris's birthday, following the gallery's long held practice to be closed on Mondays. When William Morris's birthday was last on a Monday (2003) the gallery was also closed.
- William Morris's birthday has not normally been celebrated at the gallery, at least since such records were kept. However, this year it was celebrated on Sunday 30th March when children were invited to the gallery to make birthday cards. This event was one in a new series of family activities designed to encourage people into the gallery to enjoy and learn from the experience.

How many hours in the week will it be open in the future?

- Thanks to the growth in our budget the William Morris Gallery and Vestry House Museum will be open soon to the general public for more hours during the week and staff are looking at a new schedule for bank holiday weekends.

