

Dear Martin and Tony

5 Feb 2018

### **Statement about HCT management and care of collections**

Hampshire Cultural Trust (HCT) has recently been the subject of a great deal of negative speculation regarding funding reductions and job losses, much of it based on an anonymous and ill-informed source. It is time to balance the picture and to give you a sense of how collections will be managed and made accessible in the future.

### **Achievements to date**

We are taking the opportunity to build on our successes to date and reorganise ourselves so we can better deliver great experiences that centre on our collections and stories, as well as improving their management and care. Over the last 3 years, residents of and visitors to Winchester have benefitted from the refurbishment of the ground floor of Winchester City Museum. They have been treated to a very special exhibition programme celebrating Jane Austen's bicentenary; seen the work of JMW Turner brought to Winchester and Basingstoke; and plans have been developed to celebrate Winchester's Anglo-Saxon past as the centrepiece of an effort to transform the visitor experience to the city. Around the county, we have upgraded Westbury Manor Museum in Fareham, and have had a very successful year at Milestones Museum in Basingstoke. Visitor numbers are up 15% overall and HCT is forecasting a modest surplus, as it has achieved every year since its formation. We have worked with schools and community groups across Hampshire to deliver classes, events and projects to those who are most vulnerable or disadvantaged, and who would not usually have access to our collections, arts and culture.

We are in a good position to manage the 10% reduction in funding from our founding local authorities, Hampshire County Council and Winchester City Council, in 2018/19 which was agreed with them when HCT was established in November 2014. If the services had stayed within local authority control, funding reductions and their impact on collections would have been much greater. We are pleased to confirm that there will be no reduction of opening hours at any of our venues, and exhibitions, education and outreach activities drawing upon our collections will be enhanced.

### **Organisational changes**

The reorganisation involves changes to a number of roles across the organisation: venue management, community engagement staff who work with schools and community groups, curators and collections staff, and exhibitions personnel. One aspect of this is that we currently have curatorial staff who are based centrally at our stores and not connected with our venues. They have limited responsibility for our main public programmes in our venues. We are changing this so our curatorial expertise is also responsible for delivering our main public programmes in our venues, and thereby increasing access to our wonderful collections. There will be 4 of them who will be part of strengthened venue teams for Winchester, Milestones and our community museums portfolio. They will have support from a central team based in Winchester incorporating a collection manager,

curatorial liaison manager, 3 conservators, curatorial assistant, technician and exhibition design support, who will also have responsibility for looking after the collections. As well as central support from marketing, digital engagement, fundraising and project management. The posts are called cultural experience managers and venue manager (curatorial), and the detail of their job descriptions emphasise the important combination of curatorial and public engagement aspects of their role.

The current collections team comprises 14.5 posts, and under the reorganisation, the new resource delivering curatorial, collections care and management activities will be 11.

We have started to build an exciting programme of self-curated exhibitions, and collections-centred projects (for example, in relation to the Anglo-Saxon history of Winchester). This reorganisation will enable us to deliver on these plans, continue to improve the way we look after our collections, and ensure we are financially resilient, enabling HCT to achieve its ambition to create world-class culture in Hampshire that enriches people's lives.

### **Care and management of collections**

Collections in all disciplines will be managed by a professional collections team, consisting of a collections manager, a curatorial liaison manager, three conservators, curatorial assistant and technician support. This team will manage a preventative programme of collection care work across the trust's collections, and will also support work undertaken by work placements and volunteer groups assisting in this task. We will continue to provide ongoing access for researchers interested in our collections, and aim to improve it. Instead of knowledge in a particular specialist collection sitting with one role and access to it under one person's responsibility, we will have a team with developing knowledge across the collections, and able to provide more flexible access on a regular basis. The processes of accessioning, loans and documentation will be managed by this team, and decisions about future acquisitions made by a collections development panel that will include the cultural experience managers for each work-stream (who will have specialist knowledge themselves), and external specialist advice as required.

### **Research and cataloguing**

We also wish to develop proactive research partnerships with specialist groups and universities centred on the collections and their contribution to the development of public programmes in our Winchester, Milestones and community museums work streams. During 2018/19, our work programme will include a review of potential collection research partnership opportunities which we would like to undertake in consultation with volunteers, external organisations and specialists who are willing to work with us. A key outcome of such initiatives will include providing digital access to collections for an interested public, and we are currently investing in a new website to enable us to better support the addition of collections-related digital content.

We are saddened at how some external commentators have assumed the worst of our reorganisation and have taken on board what is inaccurate and misleading information. In the best interests of all our staff and because the reorganisation is work in progress, we cannot give you specific detail at this point in time. There is no doubt that all regional museums are under significant financial pressure and challenge, with collections across the country put at risk as a result. However, Hampshire's collections have a strong champion in Hampshire Cultural Trust, and we are working



hard to develop innovative solutions that enable us to deliver strong stewardship. This stewardship must include ensuring that our collections are made accessible for and valued by as many Hampshire people as possible. It is only by doing so that we can make the case for their ongoing importance and the need to invest in their care, management and research in the long-term. What we ask of you is to continue working with us and engaging in this journey, and not to think the worst of us because we cannot yet tell you all the detail.

With best wishes

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jo Owen', is positioned below the text 'With best wishes'.

**Dr Janet Owen, FSA, AMA, MA (Cantab), MA**

**Chief Executive**