

Executive Report

Ward(s) affected: All

Report of Director of Transformation and Governance

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Date: 23 February 2023

Heritage Services: Victorian Schoolroom education provision and potential sale of 39½ Castle Street

Executive Summary

The Victorian Schoolroom and Playroom (VSR) provides a key element of the Heritage Service education provision. It provides outside of the classroom learning experiences for Key Stage 1 and 2 children. Whilst the VSR generates income it does not cover the full costs of operating the provision.

Following the pandemic, the availability of the VSR provision was reduced. Initially, to ensure appropriate cleaning regimes could be undertaken, and then due to a reduction in casual staff to run the sessions. This means there is limited resilience within the casual team to cover staff absence. Currently, sessions are available twice a week during term time.

There are three members of casual staff who would be subject to redundancy if the provision ceases. Dedicated administration resource (to manage bookings, enquiries, invoicing etc.) was removed during the Future Guildford restructure and this function now must be delivered by an Access, Education and Engagement Officer (0.4FTE) which is not cost effective and limits the wider engagement work that can be delivered by this team. Admin tasks can take between 1.5 and 11 hours per week, depending on the time of year.

The Assets and Property team have undertaken an operational asset review which included the property used for the VSR provision (39½ Castle Street). The property has been identified, along with others in the vicinity, as not achieving the Council's investment criteria. The proposal is to include 39½ Castle Street in an auction lot, comprising nearby properties.

Steps need to be taken now to support the Heritage Service in saving money, delivering efficiencies, and providing a longer-term sustainable offer. The

recommendation in this report; to cease the VSR provision and dispose of the property; will enable the service to focus its stretched resources in other key areas and will generate income, from the sale of the property, which can be used to support an alternative location for our museum/ gallery provision (in the longer term) – see Appendix 1.

Alternative locations for the provision could be considered, however they are unlikely to reduce the financial support required for the offer and potentially require additional expenditure e.g., for remedial/ building works.

Recommendation to Executive:

That the Executive approves the following:

1. To cease the Victorian schoolroom/ playroom education offer in its current form.
2. To release the asset (39½ Castle Street) for inclusion in an auction of nearby properties.
3. That the capital receipt from the sale of 39½ Castle Street be ringfenced for future use in finding an alternative location for key Heritage Service activities.

Reason(s) for Recommendation:

To release resources which can be dedicated to other key areas of the Heritage Service and to generate a capital receipt which will contribute to developing a sustainable offer for the service in the future, including a new location for museum/ gallery activities.

Is the report (or part of it) exempt from publication? No

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The Heritage Service is currently under review and a range of desired outcomes have been agreed with Directors and various Councillors (see Appendix 1). These outcomes will help secure a long-term sustainable future for the Heritage Service, as well as deliver financial savings.
- 1.2 One of the first outcomes is to review the future of the Victorian Schoolroom (VSR) provision and property (located at 39½ Castle Street) and decide whether to include it in an auction lot, incorporating several nearby properties.
- 1.3 The Executive are asked to consider this report and to confirm if they agree with the recommendations outlined above.

2. Strategic Priorities

- 2.1 This proposal supports the following key aspects of the Council's strategic framework:

"We will spend money carefully and deliver good value for money services" by

Developing a longer-term vision for the Heritage Service with a focused, sustainable, and deliverable strategy.

Providing a better value for money service, making the best use of resources available and which maximise the heritage offer.

"Revive Guildford town centre to unlock its full potential" by

Delivering a revived, sustainable, and reimagined heritage offer in the longer-term which will contribute to making Guildford an attractive place for residents and visitors.

3. Background

- 3.1 Introduction

39½ Castle Street is a former confectionary works and has had several different uses over the years, although it was never used as a school. It now houses a recreated Victorian schoolroom and playroom which is the focus of the Heritage Service schools/ education programme. This is delivered through a hands-on learning experience. The offer has been operating from 39½ Castle Street for around twenty years.

The playroom offer is for Key Stage 1 pupils and the schoolroom for Key Stage 2 pupils, with both sessions linking to the National Curriculum. The sessions run for 4.25 hours during term time (Monday and Wednesday) and have been designed by qualified teachers. The sessions include activities such as dressing up, learning Victorian rhymes and games, experiencing a Victorian lesson, follow up teachers packs and visits to other Heritage sites (Museum/ Castle) if requested.

There is an established audience of schools who make repeat visits annually; the majority are from Guildford/ Surrey, with some schools from further afield.

- 3.2 Operational Asset Review

The Operational Asset Review, undertaken by Assets and Property, has considered a group of properties on Castle Street including 39½. These properties do not, currently, meet the Council's investment criteria and have been identified for sale. Including 39½ in the sale would allow the full

potential asset value of the wider group of properties to be realised and would maximise interest in the auction lot.

The cessation of the VSR offer would be aligned with the Assets and Property disposal programme thus ensuring that 39½ is not left vacant/unused for a prolonged period. Disposal is currently expected in Summer/Autumn of 2023.

3.3 Staffing

Prior to the Future Guildford transformation, the Heritage Service had dedicated administrative support (1FTE Finance and Admin Officer) who were responsible for administration (bookings, invoicing, enquiries) for the VSR, along with other service wide duties. The Future Guildford restructure transferred this administrative support to cover the whole of the Culture, Heritage and Leisure Service (with 0.5FTE available to Heritage). This post has never been recruited to and remains vacant.

As a result, the administration of the VSR is dealt with by one of the Access, Education and Engagement Officers (0.4FTE). The Access, Education and Engagement team is very small (2FTE with 1FTE currently being held vacant) and its primary role is to deliver outreach and engagement for the whole Heritage Service, including work which complements the programme of exhibitions. The administration of the VSR can be time consuming and, depending on the time of year, requires between 1.5 and 11 hours per week (at an approximate cost of £16 per hour).

Each schoolroom/ playroom session is run by two casual staff; one a qualified teacher and the other a 'maid' (the latter term being appropriate to the Victorian theme of the sessions) who are paid a fixed fee per session of £102.10 and £40.16 respectively, including holiday pay (based on 2022/23 casual rates).

Before 2020, the VSR was available for five sessions per week. When the provision returned following the pandemic, the number of sessions was reduced to two per week to allow for thorough cleaning of the room/s between sessions. At a similar time, the pool of available casual staff reduced from five to three. New suitable casual staff can be very challenging to recruit due to the specialist nature of the role/s. With limited casual staff resources, two sessions per week are continuing and there is inadequate resilience in covering staff absence which can result in cancelled/ rescheduled sessions.

The three remaining members of casual VSR staff would be subject to consultation and at risk of redundancy with the cessation of the VSR provision.

3.4 Bookings and attendance

A minimum booking of 25 pupils per session is required, at a cost per child of £6.70 for the playroom and £7.00 for the schoolroom (based on 2022/23 fees and charges). Teachers attend free. Maximum numbers are 32 for the playroom and 36 for the schoolroom.

The table below shows the total number of bookings and pupils for the VSR over the last six years.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20*	2020/21**	2021/22**
Total bookings	56	93	87	67	5	23
Total number of pupils	1,529	2,626	2,648	2,110	137	647

* The VSR was closed for approximately three months for repairs and maintenance.

** Periods of enforced Covid closure and available sessions reduced from five per week to two.

There are currently a total of twenty-one bookings for the VSR to the end of the calendar year (December 2023).

3.5 Outreach and learning

The VSR provision supports museum accreditation (from Arts Council England) by delivering 'stimulating learning and discovery activities' which are defined in the accreditation guidance as follows:

9.1 To provide stimulating learning and discovery activities, including exhibitions and programmes based on your collections

You should have a variety of ways for people to learn. These should help a broad range of people to access your museum and collections.

The Museum has been invited to reapply for museum accreditation with a deadline of 19 June 2023. Accreditation demonstrates that the museum meets several criteria including those relating to its financial position, operation, promotion, accessibility, and care of objects. It also provides access to loan in/ out objects and applications to funding, which may not be available to non-accredited museums.

Applying for reaccreditation will necessitate revisiting the education offer to deliver key objectives within the guidance (shown above). This will be

developed within the wider 'business plan' for the Museum/ service which is required as part of the reaccreditation process.

The VSR provides the Heritage Service with the opportunity to promote other heritage sites; several schools visit the Castle or Museum as part of their excursion.

With limited resources in the Access, Education and Engagement team, the VSR provision allows the service to reach school audiences and deliver outside the classroom learning and education during term time, in a structured way.

3.6 Fixtures and fittings

A period of transition will be required prior to the sale of the property which will allow for the removal of fixtures/ fittings and potential 'making good' of the property ready for sale. There is a large amount of furniture in the VSR which will need to be removed and relocated.

If repurposing any furniture/ fixtures etc. is not possible within the Heritage Service itself, there would be an effort to transfer items to other relevant organisations nearby. Some of the furniture within the VSR has been donated by external organisations, including Friends of Guildford Museum.

4. Alternative options

- 4.1 Preliminary work has been undertaken to establish the potential viability of moving the VSR offer to the Brew House (located to the rear of Guildford House). This appears to be unfeasible as, amongst several other significant issues (including some building works), it would require a reduction in maximum numbers for each session (as the space is smaller) with a resulting loss in income. Fees would potentially need to be increased which could have a negative impact on bookings.
- 4.2 There could be an option to identify a new location (outside of the current Heritage portfolio) for a VSR provision, however with limited resources (finance and human), this is likely to be difficult to deliver unless it was part of a wider Heritage strategy.
- 4.3 The viability challenges faced by the existing offer are unlikely to be overcome in an alternative venue, however these options could be considered as part of an alternative approach to the schools/ education programme required to ensure compliance with museum accreditation criteria.

5. Consultations

- 5.1 Corporate Management Board and Executive Liaison Group have received and discussed this report and its recommendations. Some Directors and

Councillors have also been involved in workshops to discuss the future of the Heritage Service more widely and identifying ways of delivering savings, efficiencies and increasing the sustainability for the future. Further details are included in Appendix 1.

6. Key Risks

6.1 Ramifications/ risks

In the event of 39½ Castle Street being part of the property disposal in the Summer/ Autumn of 2023, we would expect the following ramifications:

- A capital receipt expected to be in the region of £350,000, less transaction and legal costs.
- Financial saving of £5,421 (income less expenditure) in 2023/24 revenue budget (support service costs are not currently included in budgets for the VSR in 2023/24).
- Three casual members of staff potentially subject to redundancy with a provisional cost of £3,690.
- Possible reputational impact for the Council (including with Friends of Guildford Museum who donated some of the furniture, schools for cancelled bookings and local media).
- Loss of education/ learning provision for the service in its current form and possible impact on museum accreditation (see above).

To mitigate some of the risks identified above, there would be a detailed communications plan.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 The table below shows the financial information for 2018/19 and 2019/20 (years where the VSR was able to operate five sessions per week). The current operation of the provision does not perform, financially, as positively as the years outlined below (this is due to reduced availability of sessions).

	2018/19	2019/20
Casual staff salaries	£11,997	£9,770
Premises (business rates)	£2,909	£2,974
Supplies/ Services	£165	£25
Total expenditure	£15,071	£12,769
Total income	(£15,314)	(£9,253)
Income/ expenditure	£243	-£3,516

NB:

- a. There was a three-month closure in 2019/20 for repairs/ maintenance, however costs for this work are not reflected in the expenditure shown above.
- b. Internal support services were not recharged to the VSR in the period shown above, nor were salaries for admin support or for the Heritage team cleaning the venue.
- c. There is no account code for utilities within the VSR budgets.

7.2 Factoring in the additional expenditure not directly allocated to the VSR (support services, admin function, cleaning costs), it is clear the provision is consistently operated at a loss and the diminishing availability of sessions further increases this shortfall.

7.3 The estimated sale value of 39½ Castle Street is in the region of £350,000.

8. Legal Implications

8.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

9. Human Resource Implications

9.1 Loss of the VSR provision would mean three members of casual staff would no longer have a role and are likely to be made redundant/ redeployed. A minimum thirty-day consultation with these staff will be required and approximate redundancy costs are £3,690.

9.2 The 0.4FTE Access, Education and Engagement Officer, who currently manages VSR admin, will be able to focus on the primary duties of their role to develop and plan outreach and engagement activities more widely across the Service.

9.3 It would also release Heritage Service staff, currently engaged in cleaning/ maintaining the venue, for other activities.

10. Equality and Diversity Implications

10.1 The cessation of the VSR provision will mostly impact school aged children who are the primary users of the offer. Options for alternative learning experiences are available on an ad hoc basis through the Heritage Service, as well as from other organisations in the area. Due to the limited availability of sessions and low numbers, the impact of stopping the provision is low. An EIA has been prepared.

11. Climate Change/Sustainability Implications

- 11.1 Aside from a possible reduction in coaches/ minibuses travelling into the town centre, there are no further climate change/ sustainability implications.

12.. Summary of Options

- 12.1 The options in relation to the VSR are:

Cease the current VSR provision and dispose of the building to release funds which can be ringfenced to support the Heritage offer going forward.

Continue with the current provision, requiring ongoing financial support and without generating funds to help sustain the future Heritage offer.

Find a new location for the VSR provision which will likely require increased ongoing financial support as well as additional (unplanned) expenditure to set up the new offer.

13. Conclusion

- 13.1 The Heritage Service is under pressure to make financial savings and ensure a sustainable future. By ceasing the education provision delivered via the VSR, funds will be released that can further support the Heritage offer for the future and staffing resources can be focussed on other key aspects of the Service.

14.. Background Papers

None.

15. Appendices

Appendix 1: outcomes from Heritage workshop 03 November 2022.