

<b>Title of Report: Museum &amp; Visitor Services Digital Engagement Programme 2020-21</b>	<b>Officer Presenting: Head of Culture Author: Curator</b>
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## **1 Purpose of Report/Recommendations**

1.1 To present Members with the Museum & Visitor Services “Digital Engagement programme for 2020-21”.

## **2 Background**

2.1 During 2019-20 the Museum & Visitor Services Team have delivered a varied and detailed programme of exhibitions, events and raised the participation and engagement of visitors who have visited DCSDC Museum and Visitor Services facilities such as the Tower Museum and Guildhall.

2.2 The current Coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak, which began in December 2019, presents a significant challenge for the entire world. The health crisis known as Covid-19 changed not only our lives, but the way we live and work. The pandemic has created a world where we are isolated and physically ‘disconnected’ with one another. It is now more than ever crucial that we adapt and plan for this new world of digital technology whilst ensuring personal health and wellbeing for all. Our programme is fluid and ever evolving as the team learn and adapt new ways of digital engagement.

2.3 In March 2020 the Museum & Visitor Services team was mobilised and attention was focused on developing an Operational Recovery Plan. This was required to assist with planning and deal effectively with the current issues arising from ‘lockdown’ and eventual phased reopening of facilities and delivery of key visitor services.

2.4 The new focus was to deliver a digital engagement programme for both the Museum and Visitor Services Team with essential support from our digital and marketing teams.

## **3 Key Issues**

3.1 Covid-19 has put pressure on budgets and officers have reviewed and amended the 2020-21 programme to provide a digital offer for the public within existing resources **(Appendix 1)**. It is a creative and engaging programme focused on promoting our heritage and visitor experiences through our buildings and collections in three key areas:

1. Exhibitions
2. Events
3. Programmes

3.2 There are two main Exhibitions which will take place during 2020-21:

1/ Dividing Ireland: The Origins Impact & Legacy of Partition

This is a Peace 4 funded project which examines the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and a significant time in our history of Partition and the formation of Northern Ireland. Events at home and around Europe from 1912 to 1922 oversaw monumental changes to the political and social structures of the island of Ireland. This exhibition explores some of those events through objects and documents in our collection.

Access to the exhibition will be created by focusing on significant artefacts online. These include animated exhibition overviews, staff voiceovers on collections in detail and behind the scenes closer looks at collections in storage which are guided by staff. The Exhibition is part of the Understanding the Decade of Commemorations project, supported by the European Union's PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

2/ The Fair River Valley - Strabane

There is a rich archaeological heritage in the Strabane area and this exhibition will display prehistoric artefacts which are on loan from the Department for Communities/Historic Environment Division. The Museum team has produced guided video insights into never seen before Neolithic collections from Co. Tyrone. A new animated feature has been created for the accompanying exhibition '*If Stones could Speak*'. These were uploaded onto Social Media and will act as a 'taster' or glimpse of the future exhibition which will be installed into the Alley Theatre, Strabane.

- 3.3 The Events Programme for the service creates an opportunity for maximum engagement with different sections of our community. Key highlights include Workers Rights & Social Justice Week, Mayor's Virtual Tea Dance, HED/European Heritage Open Days and Culture Night.
- 3.4 Worker's Rights & Social Justice Week Programme was delivered from 27 April - 1 May 2020. This was the first event delivered digitally for the service and involved keynote speakers delivering a series of talks through the setup of online webinars. Trade Union Collections were also digitised & uploaded onto the Tower Museum Learning website.
- 3.5 Working with Festivals & Events the Museum provided a digital archive from the Tower Museum's 'Showbands of the North-West' Exhibition for a special BBC Radio Foyle Mark Patterson Show. This was a live 'Virtual' Tea Dance which was introduced by the Mayor of Derry and Strabane Councillor Michaela Boyle. It was a popular event which created a lot of local interest and brought back many memories.
- 3.6 As part of the review of the programme a new Tower Museum Collections Website is being created at [www.towermuseumcollections.com](http://www.towermuseumcollections.com). It will highlight the collection focused work and engagement the museum team have been carrying out. On it will be information about temporary exhibitions, searchable collections, artefact galleries, oral history recordings, animations and events.
- 3.7 HED/European Heritage Open Days will take place virtually this year. EHOD have been celebrating heritage and the built environment in Northern Ireland since 1997. It is delivered with the support of local councils, community groups and the many owners and volunteers. The theme this year is '*Heritage and Education*' and the Tower Museum will open the doors and welcome the public into a behind the scenes '*virtual*' tour of its collections stores. Guildhall will provide a Virtual Treasure Hunt where clues and videos will be released daily from Monday 7<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> September.
- 3.8 Culture Night is due to take place on 18 Sept 2020. The Museum & Visitor Service has begun a 'Countdown to Culture' where pictures and videos will be shared weekly. Plans for a virtual / hybrid organ recital in the Main Hall and Irish / Ulster Scots story telling are in place and the programme may develop as guidance on lockdown progresses.

- 3.9 The Visitor Services Team are rolling out a series of virtual tours for the Guildhall and Tower Museum which started in June. Videos will be shared throughout the Summer Months inviting visitors to view behind the scenes as well as the tourist favourites within the Guildhall and Tower Museum.
- 3.10 A Day in the Life - Curating the Contemporary/Covid19 is a major project which was initiated by the Museum Service on contemporary collecting. This is aimed at the public to describe what their lives are like during Covid-19. Our Mayor has added support in providing a personal submission. All content will be used to build a contemporary virtual gallery. Phase 2 of the initiative will involve direct engagement with local communities in partnership with the Nerve Centre. This phase will produce a lot of rich collections content for social media.
- 3.11 In September there will be a series of Mindfulness @the Museum – as part of the museum Mindfulness Mondays sessions. Collections have the power to provide health and wellbeing benefits. This is an opportunity to learn some relaxation techniques and to engage with our art collections in a new and meaningful way. The Curator will lead a mindfulness session followed by a fresh look at paintings from our art collections. There will be an opportunity for discussion and reflection.
- 3.12 Love to Move is a 6 week funded by NIMC using ZOOM. It is aimed at the older population in our community. Based on the British Gymnastics Foundation programme of gentle exercise. 20 minutes will be spent for the exercises and 20 minutes for reminiscing delivered by Education and Access Assistant. Sessions have taken place with Glenowen Court/Radius Housing, Belfast. This is an opportunity to widen the museum's Learning & Engagement Programme and raise its profile through NI.
- 3.13 There has been input into this Museum & Visitor Services programme from other DCSDC officers within Arts & Culture, Festivals & Events, Marketing, Regeneration and Environmental Health.
- 3.14 Officers have also sought partnership working with organisations such as: Northern Ireland Museums Council, University of Ulster, National Heritage Lottery Fund and PRONI. They continue to explore potential partnerships for alignment of resources and programmes. We also have linked in with VisitDerry, TNI, DiscoverNI to promote our virtual tours, with a view to extend.

#### **4 Financial, Equality, Legal, HR, Improvement, Rural Needs and other Implications**

- 4.1 There is no additional financial cost for the proposed digital programme as all proposals are provided by the Museum & Visitor Services Staff with support from the IT and Marketing Teams. Only a small amount from the Museum & Visitor Services budget (approximately £5,000) will be used due to the current financial situation.
- 4.2 This is an online digital programme accessible to all those who have access to a computer and the internet.
- 4.3 We are due to open a number of facilities under tight Covid-19 restrictions in July 2020 so the plan is to open the physical exhibitions to the general public in September in the Tower Museum and the Alley Theatre, where possible. The programme outlined above will be developed in a hybrid format to enable reopening but making sure that there is maximum engagement with our collections.

## **5 Recommendations**

- 5.1 Members are asked to note the contents of the reports and approve the new and evolving "Digital Engagement Programme 2020-2021" for the Museum and Visitor Services Team.

## **Background Papers**

### **Appendix 1 – Museum & Visitor Services Engagement Programme 2020-2021**