

Equality Impact Assessment – Proposal for removal of funding for The Lightbox

Officer responsible for completing EIA: Arts Development Officer & Leisure Manager	Manager responsible for EIA: Steve May
Strategic Director responsible for EIA: Louise Strongitharm	Date last updated: 7 December 2023

1. Introduction

This Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) seeks to identify impacts and effect of this proposal with the aim of assessing whether it would have a disparate impact on persons with a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. As part of this assessment, consideration will be given to ways in which any such impact can be avoided or mitigated, any negative impacts arising from this proposal will be assessed and where this could be reduced in their impact this will be noted in the attached action plan. The Council also recognises that it may not completely remove all negative impacts.

The purpose is to provide impartial information to assist in the decision-making process and inform rather than determine policy. The objective is not to make the decision but to assist decision makers through the provision of relevant information.

The Council faces a critical financial shortfall owing to its historic investment strategy which has resulted in unaffordable borrowing, inadequate steps to repay that borrowing and high values of irrecoverable loans.

To address these severe financial challenges the Council must make significant saving alongside taking steps to 'live within its means' in the future.

Widespread reductions and changes to public-facing services, alongside reducing management and internal costs, have been set out in the [Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy](#).

This Equality Impact Assessment covers the removal of £339,000 funding to The Lightbox as part of the Council's withdrawal of all discretionary funding from 2024/25. The lightbox does have a management agreement in place which stipulates the level of support that can be expected from the council but the notice period for this has been served in accordance with the document. "The Lightbox has been provisionally allocated £130k UK SPF funding – this will provide an opportunity for the gallery to transform its business model and continue to operate as a regional cultural hub, attracting visitors to Woking. The continued operation of the Lightbox will also avoid the Council incurring costs as a result of becoming liable for the building". This change will move the facility away from the high level of art gallery currently being provided to a more rounded community facility, offering space to hire for local arts and similar groups.

The last published [annual report](#) on The Lightbox website is for the financial year 2018-2019. In this report concerns were highlighted about the future funding of The Lightbox.

“Finance Review: The Trustees are conscious of the need for the organisation to generate an operating surplus in the future to build reserves to meet the aspirations of the organisation. However, they recognise that the current economic climate has made securing funds extremely challenging and continue to seek regular additional funding. A new Development department was created during the year with a remit to make trust and foundation applications, increase corporate support, increase Friends membership and launch a legacy campaign.

Reserves Policy: The Board has instituted a policy whereby the unrestricted funds, not designated for any other purpose should cover between 6 and 9 months of the operating costs of the organisation. At present the free reserves carried forward do not meet this level and therefore the reserves will have to continue to be built up from income in the coming years.

Future Strategy: In view of the current economic climate the Board constantly reviews the current business model and is currently revising the five year forward plan for the organisation. The Board is keen to ensure long term viability for the organisation and to ensure that it is equipped to deal with reductions or alterations to current funding streams. We are working to achieve financial sustainability by controlling costs and generating income from our activities in the shop, café and corporate hire income facilities. These activities complement the financial provision from our service contract with Woking Borough Council and our Fundraising activities.”

2. Impact on services

As an independent charity, The Lightbox believes in the transformative power of visual arts and deliver this mission through a programme of modern and contemporary visual art, outreach activity, and housing The Ingram Collection and Woking's Story.

If funding is removed The Lightbox may have to close due to a lack of funds to keep the doors open.

Their inclusive and diverse learning and wellbeing programmes create lasting impact for local communities including those affected by mental health issues and dementia. Groups worked with include Actions for Carers, Alzheimers's Society, Linkable, Woking and Sam Beare Hospice and Catalyst. They work with an estimated 120 school groups and young people and are passionate about the role that cultural institutions have in fostering the development of young minds. If funding is stopped by Woking Borough Council all these activities will have to stop and impact the groups that have benefitted from these activities

3. Engagement and consultation

The Council has carried out public engagement on all proposed savings to ensure a balanced budget for the 2024/25 financial year.

The **first phase of the engagement** took place in summer 2023. Residents and businesses had the opportunity to have their say on how to tackle the budget shortfall. This is what they had to say about the economic impact. [Help shape the future of discretionary council services | Woking Community Forum](#)

The **second phase of the public engagement** took place between **2 October and 12 November**. Residents and businesses had another opportunity to scrutinise the proposed savings and have their say. This included a range of options for finding further budget savings, such as increasing Council tax and making changes to the way services are delivered, which may mean reducing or withdrawing services, or indeed making revised charges or working with partner organisations. The outcome of this consultation will be reported to Council in January 2024, with a full Council decision on 8 February 2024. The report can be found [here](#).

There were 422 comments on the Council's approach to the Medium Term Financial Strategy. 94% of the comments were negative towards how the Council is approaching the MTFs, compared to 6% who were supportive of the Council's approach. 63% of respondents had concerns about The Lightbox closing due to potential loss of funding from the Council.

The Lightbox has engaged with users and key stakeholders to ask for support in this difficult period. Both the Arts Council England and The Heritage Lottery have been receptive in offering consultative support but cannot plug the gap in finances.

A number of sessions have been held with Woking Borough Council Officers and the administration to fully understand the impact of the removal of the grant funding and to look at opportunities. A business case has been prepared.

		Positive impact?			Negative impact?	No specific impact	What will the impact be? If the impact is negative how can it be mitigated? (action) This section needs to be completed as evidence of what the positive impact is or what actions are being taken to mitigate any negative impacts
		Eliminate discrimination	Advance equality	Good relations			
Gender	Men					x	All genders are affected equally. The Lightbox does not specifically capture data on the gender profile of users. There is no specific impact on this group.
	Women					x	As Above
Gender Reassignment						x	As Above
Race	White					x	Lightbox does not capture ethnicity data on visitors, however the majority of users are White. All groups will be impacted in a similar way so there is not specific impact on this group.
	Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups					x	As Above,
	Asian/Asian British				x		The educational work targets hard to reach groups, so it may impact work done with groups such as Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum and Shah Jahan Mosque.
	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British				x		As Above
	Gypsies / travellers				x		As Above
	Other ethnic group				x		As Above
Disability	Physical				X		The Lightbox works hard to be an inclusive and accessibly venue. Data on usage from specific groups is not collected but the venue is easily accessible for all. Educations sessions are run throughout the school holidays and in conjunctions with local schools. Children with Special Education Needs are well supported. See the last published annual report for specific group activities. Download.ashx (thelightbox.org.uk)
	Sensory				X		
	Learning Difficulties				X		
	Mental Health				X		

Sexual Orientation	Lesbian, gay men, bisexual					x	Data is not collected on users but it is assumed there is no specific impact on this group.
Age	Older people (50+)					x	Age data is not collected on users but the Lightbox works directly with groups such as the University of the Third Age and Sam Beare Hospice. Bases on the 2018-2019 annual report The Lightbox is a Dementia Friendly Champion organisation and Art in Mind is a programme of monthly art workshops for people living with dementia and their carers that has been running for 3 years. A new programme Art Without Walls has taken creative activity into care homes in the local area to reduce isolation and loneliness and bring inspiration for residents to embark on their own art work. Download.ashx (thelightbox.org.uk)
	Young people					x	Educational sessions are run throughout the school holidays and in conjunctions with local schools. Also work with 120 school groups. See last annual report on workshops for young people. Download.ashx (thelightbox.org.uk)
Religion or Belief	Faith Groups					x	Data is not collected on users but it is assumed there is no specific impact on this group.
Pregnancy & maternity						x	Data is not collected on users but it is assumed there is no specific impact on this group.
Marriage & Civil Partnership						x	Data is not collected on users but it is assumed there is no specific impact on this group.
Socio-economic Background						x	Currently free access to some of the exhibitions and Working Story. Also free access on last Thursday of the month after 5pm.
Carers						x	The Lightbox is a Dementia Friendly Champion organisation and Art in Mind is a programme of monthly art workshops for people living with dementia and their carers that has been running for 3 years. (Annual Report 2018-2019)

Other identified groups			x	For the 7th year the Learning department worked with Woking's York Road Project, offering creative workshops to their homeless clients. Download.ashx (thelightbox.org.uk)
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Action Plan:

Actions identified from EIA	Target completion date	Responsible Officer	Comments
Provide support to find other funding streams and an alternative Business model.	31/03/2024	Funding Officer & Corporate & Health & Leisure Manager	
Support with collaboration with partner/private organisations to secure future funding.	31/03/2024	Corporate & Business Liaison	
Identify community groups to continue delivering the arts activities that reach identified vulnerable target groups. Identify funding sources.	31/03/2024	Arts Development Officer	

SIGNOFF:

LEGAL SERVICES: Completed	DATE: 8 January 2024
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR: Completed	DATE: 22 January 2024
REVIEW PANEL MEMBER: Completed	DATE: 4 January 2024