

King John's House and Heritage Centre

Update on the Thriving Museum Boards project for
the Hampshire Solent Open Forum meeting on 2 February 2015

About KJH & Heritage Centre

KJH and Heritage Centre is a small complex of historic buildings with a garden and a tea room situated in the centre of Romsey, opposite the Abbey. It is run by a charitable trust which owns 2 of the buildings: King John's House, a medieval building, and Tudor Cottage. The Moody Museum is in the former gunshop and home of the Moody family, a Victorian building leased from TVBC; the trust also leases the surrounding King John's Garden.

Board of Trustees

We are currently “working towards accreditation”. The application includes a section on governance, and looking at this we became aware that our board of trustees is unbalanced, with mostly older trustees who have been put forward by our district and parish councils and local societies. The board lacks skills in fund-raising, marketing and advertising.

We already have the powers under our constitution to appoint new trustees, but it is not easy to find younger people with the time or the interest to become a trustee. It is also very difficult to remove trustees who have been on the board for many years and who know each other well.

We would like to achieve a better system of succession, so that trustees feel that they are not stuck in post for ever, so that they can retire without feeling they are leaving the other board members in the lurch.

Thriving Museum Boards: Growing Trustee Diversity

We applied to take part in the “Growing Trustees Diversity” project as we felt that it would help us to achieve a better succession of members of our board and identify how to attract younger trustees and some with the skills we are lacking.

We felt that the student team would also benefit from working with us. We have a busy, vibrant museum complex which would provide an ideal environment for the post-graduates to experience at first-hand what we do and what sorts of problems we face.

The 2 students working with us are law graduates who are doing post-graduate degrees to become Company Secretaries. They are not able to come today, but they write the following:

“We took the opportunity to take part in the project as a means of putting into practice on a highly individualised project the theory of what we are learning on our course of study. The opportunity to be associated with King John's House and Heritage Centre has been an extremely valuable learning experience.

It provides an insight into governance issues from a perspective of wide public interest; the internal management of the organisation and its contribution to society are both commendable. As students of corporate governance, we focused on

understanding the mechanisms, relations, processes and directions that were in place. We identified the areas where the existing mechanisms were not easily identifiable, measurable or transparent.

Currently we are working together with the management team (*that's us!*) to develop these issues in line with a suitable governance structure. We believe that this will enable all the stakeholders to gauge where the organisation stands today and which direction it is heading towards, especially regarding museum accreditation.”

So far, jointly with the students, we have produced a volunteering policy and volunteering agreement, which we will present to our trustees to be formally adopted in May.

As regards working towards accreditation, the students are in the process of drafting the following policy statements related to organisational health:

- 1) Appropriate management arrangements
- 2) Appropriate workforce
- 3) Access to professional advice and input to policy development and decision making
- 4) Organisational approach to environmental sustainability

They hope to produce draft versions soon. They are also working on developing a diversity toolkit in recruiting new trustees, along with a short report on the succession arrangements for trustees.

So far so good. From our point of view the project has already made us look carefully at the composition of our governing board. We have the means to make changes, and the students are pinpointing what to change and how best to do it.

I would like to thank Lucy, Museum Development Officer, for drawing this project to our attention. It is proving most useful in helping us work towards our main goal for the immediate future – which is to achieve accredited museum status.

Gill Maddick
2 February 2015