



AIM Trustees Newsletter June 2016 – **EXTRACTS**

News Just For You

Welcome to this first AIM newsletter created especially for heritage sector trustees. Please share this newsletter with your colleagues on your Trustee board or with anyone that is interested in governance topics and news. We welcome new readers and signing up for this newsletter can be done easily here: [Trustee News Sign Up](#)

In each edition, we will be highlighting advice on governance issues, details of upcoming events and insights into best practice in governance from people who understand the vital role that trustees play in all sizes of organisation.

Please let us know what topics you would like to see in future editions of this newsletter so that we can help you and your organisation flourish – all suggestions are welcome – by emailing: sassy@aim-museums.co.uk

AIM Hallmarks: Helping To Promote Better Governance

One of the Hallmarks identified by AIM as contributing to a prospering museum is Governance. Successful museums are those where trustees and senior staff or volunteers understand their different roles and work together towards a shared purpose – so how can we ensure that harmonious relationships are established and nurtured? Over the next few years, AIM will be running a series of sessions, events and funding streams to help AIM members and their trustees get to grips with good governance all based around the [AIM Hallmarks of Prospering Museums](#).

The Code of Ethics for Museums and Trustees

Marilyn Scott is a Trustee of AIM and of several museums, as well as Director of award-winning museum and gallery, [The Lightbox](#). In this article she shares thoughts about what the Code of Ethics for Museums means for museums' governing bodies.

One of the areas which has come up in discussion often is ethics and how Trustees 'make the right decisions'. I thought it would be helpful to look at the

recently revised Museums Association Code of Ethics and what that tells us about museum Trustees' responsibilities.

The three main principles are:

Public engagement and public benefit

Stewardship of collections

Individual and institutional integrity

[In Accreditation terms, of course, these are respectively seeking and looking after our visitors, caring for our collections, and good governance.]

We spoke at the training about vision and clarity of purpose and it is incumbent on Trustees to ensure that everything their organisation does is about public benefit. Even the smallest volunteer run museum can ensure that they provide good access to their collections, that they encourage the use of the museum by schools and communities and that collections are used and displayed in a way that encourages engagement.

The overriding responsibility of Trustees in the charity sector is ensuring adherence to the legal requirements they operate under and a special part of this for museums is the safe stewardship of museum collections. This of course includes ensuring collections are safeguarded, kept secure and above all not used for private gain such as selling parts of the collection, unless under very special and approved circumstances.

Integrity is a hard word to define, in the museum context it is about ensuring the reputation of your organisation is always upheld in an honest manner and that individual Trustees or as a group do not take any actions to bring the organisation into disrepute. The way I explained this in simple terms at the training was that it is a Trustees' responsibility to always speak positively about the museum, to build the reputation whenever possible, but to carry out all business in an honest and open manner. When things go well – talk about them, when there has been a mistake be honest and open and find ways of putting it right and you will maintain that vital public support.

Hot Topics For Heritage Trustees

The Charity Commission have published a range of useful information in recent weeks, much of it with a focus on the financial resilience of charities.

A recent blog called [Happy new financial year: time for a spring clean](#) by Nick Mott, highlights the opportunity of the financial year end for charities to use the financial information they gather to think about how it can inform their strategy for the year ahead. It includes links to several other useful pieces of Charity Commission guidance including newly published guidance on reserves, and 'Charity governance, finance and resilience: 15 questions trustees should ask'.

The Commission have also updated their guidance on managing financial difficulties which can be viewed [HERE](#).

They say: “We recognise that charities operate in a very challenging environment, with many charities facing a daily challenge of making ends meet... Our updated guidance recommends that trustees review their charity's financial position and its performance against budgets and future projections at least once a month. It explains:

- trustee duties in relation to the protection of charity assets
- what trustees need to know about the charity's assets and if their use is restricted
- when a charity may face insolvency if it's unable to pay its debts
- when trustees may be liable for any debts as they fall due”

Last month the commission highlighted that too many small charities do not know about their reporting obligations, based on their examination of sample annual reports and accounts. The report also looked at how well the requirement for public benefit reporting is being met.

A Chair's View: An Interview With Michael Day

Michael Day, chief executive of Historic Royal Palaces (HRP), has recently been appointed a vice president for AIM. He is also chair of trustees at Battersea Arts Centre. What does he think about some of our sector's current key issues?

Q. The AIM Hallmarks of Prospering Museums highlight the features we believe successful museums usually demonstrate. What do you think are the things museums need to pay most attention to if they are to prosper?

A. The AIM Hallmarks are an important reminder that success comes when you get all eight of the framework areas right. Each needs constant attention and improvement but my experience tells me that two are prerequisites for the rest.

The first is Purpose. The most important question museum organisations need to answer is: ‘What are we here for? What's the point of us?’ The answer has to be simple, powerful and relevant for people, as there needs to be an audience for this purpose that wants to engage with (and pay for) the organisation's outputs. Agreeing and stating purpose, centring it in relation to your audience and keeping it at the forefront of everyone's mind is the most important act of leadership you can do.

That leads to the second prerequisite – Leadership and Culture. Quite simply, I have never seen a successful museum that is not well-led, and effective distributed leadership creates a positive culture. So, start with purpose and leadership – and the rest will be possible.

Q. Museum trustees have a crucial role in the success of their museums. What do you think are the characteristics of a strong board and how can museums cultivate these characteristics?

A. Strong boards are critical to organisational survival and success. All trustees find the apparently conflicting demands of advocacy/cheerleading and scrutiny/ policing hard to balance. Among the many challenges organisations face with their boards, I would highlight three:

*How to establish and sustain a trustee group with a shared sense of commitment to the organisation's mission and values, who can work together with wisdom, judgement and insight, give sufficient time and energy and have status in the eyes of stakeholders.

*How to establish and sustain relationships of trust across the board and between trustees/CEO/staff/stakeholders, which, critically, are robust in times of stress.

*How to enable boards to manage ambiguity; knowing when to intervene and when not to; understanding that a range of styles and levels of intervention are needed at different times and in different circumstances.

Upcoming Seminars For Heritage Trustees

Engaging Board meetings

This workshop is for anyone who has ever felt their board could be engaging with big, exciting questions as well as the routine oversight of their organisation. It will aim to answer questions such as "How do we engage board members in creative conversations and invite them to contribute their ideas with enthusiasm?" as well as enabling boards to ensure they bring their attention to what matters most for the organisation.

Thursday 7 July, 12.30 – 4.30 at Manchester Cathedral Visitor Centre

Wednesday 19 October, 11.30 – 3.30 in London

Reviewing your board for succession planning

For any board which needs to recruit new trustees or broaden its range of skills, this interactive workshop will provide practical tips for board succession planning, including how to conduct a useful skills audit and recruitment methods in practice.

Wednesday 28 September, 11.30 – 3.30 at Birmingham and Midland Institute

Monday 14 November, 11.30 – 3.30, in London

For further information or to book your place please email: shanna@aim-museums.co.uk