

## Museums

# Partnership with Independent and Community Museums

## West Lothian Council

### Contact for Enquiries

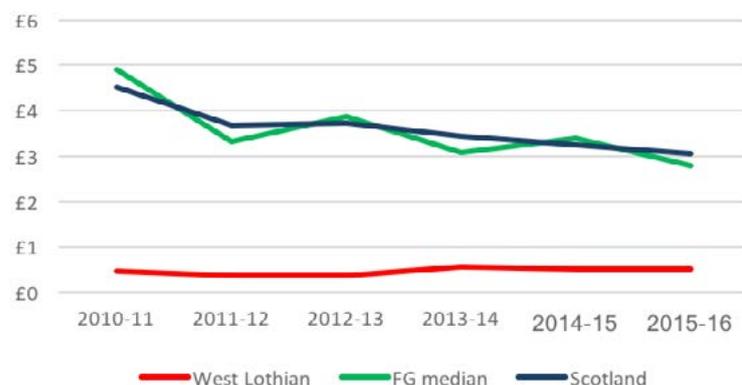
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Continued budgetary pressures have presented West Lothian Council operational challenges in terms of the delivery of their museums services. The need to explore new ways of working and the development of partnerships helped provide opportunities for innovation and engagements, increasing museum visits and realising cost savings.

### Background

An increase in museum visits has seen West Lothian Council report one of the lowest unit costs with a year on year decrease in the last three years. To achieve its aim of providing wider access to museum services to communities, amongst continued budgetary pressures and efficiency savings being made, West Lothian Council needed to find a creative solution.

Cost of Museums per Visit



When West Lothian Council's Museums Service was established, it was designed to provide a supporting role to independent museums rather than being a central provider of Museum Services in West Lothian. A small staff resource (1.5 FTE employees) meant that West Lothian Council museum staff had to consider different and innovative approaches to ensure that the residents of West Lothian could benefit from its museums services. Their solution to achieving their aim of increasing their reach and visitor numbers was partnership working. West Lothian Council's aims included:

- To provide access to museums to as many of West Lothian's areas and residents especially targeting those hard to reach groups.

- To overall increase the number of visits to the museum gaining more exposure
- To achieve aims using the current resource without incurring further cost

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## Key Activities

Key activities included:

### Partnership Collaboration

West Lothian Council has teamed up with three independent museums in West Lothian. These independent museums are provided with funding to deliver museums services, including education sessions on behalf of the council. A Service Funding Agreement is in place with each of these museums with each organisation being expected to deliver key outcomes identified in the agreement.

### Volunteers

Two of the independent museums are run almost entirely run by volunteers. This keeps running costs at a minimum. Professional support is provided by the council Museum Officer to ensure quality provision.

### Asset Management

The Council provides Community Museums in areas not covered by the independents museums These are located within existing council facilities, thereby keeping running costs at a minimum. Outreach projects are focused on areas that do not have independent museums to ensure hard to reach groups can access the museum's services. External funding from organisations including Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Museum Galleries are typically used to fund projects. Projects are also delivered in partnership with external organisations and other council partners.

### Community Museums

The Museums Service is currently working on an HLF funded project with the Living Memory Association (LMA) to record memories of gala days. The project will result in an exhibition that tours around West Lothian Council's community museums. The majority of this work has been undertaken by an LMA project officer who has been able to represent both the LMA and West Lothian Council across the community. This has helped to engage new audiences. As a spin-off of this project the Museums Service is also working with the LMA to operate a Reminiscence Centre at a central shopping facility.

The Museums Service also operates a Reminiscence Loan Service. This was developed from a funded project involving the creation and sourcing of resources, the establishment of a Reminiscence

Network and Reminiscence training for care home and museum staff. Care homes borrow resources from this central service and are able to run their own Reminiscence and care sessions. This has reduced demands on museum staff time to go and deliver Reminiscence sessions and care homes do not need to buy their own supply of Reminiscence resources. This particular service targets a vulnerable group – those that have dementia.

The Museums Service has found it difficult to sustain the Reminiscence Network since the end of funding for the Reminiscence Project. However new resources are developed in consultation with care home and the museums relationship with the sector is strong. West Lothian Council are actively looking for partnerships.

### Staff training and development

West Lothian Council has also developed multiple roles for staff to ensure the widest impact at reduced cost. For example, the part-time Museum Assistant undertakes documentation work as well as delivering sessions to schools, developing a rounded skill set.

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## Benefits and Impact

Key benefits and impacts are:

### Increase on visits

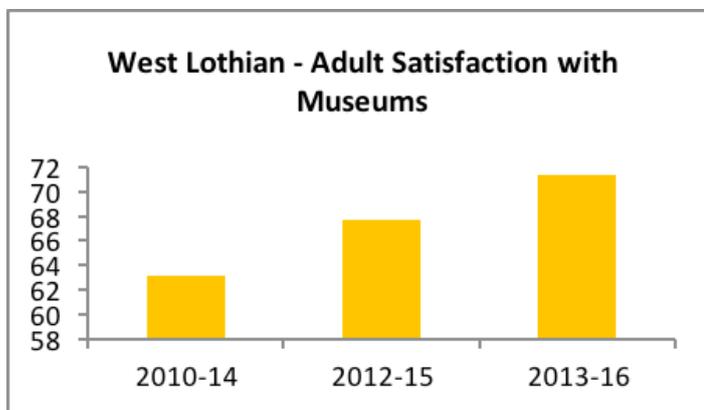
Usage of Museum Services has increased since the establishment of the central Reminiscence Loan Service in 2013 with use increasing from 163,144 to 187,609 (2014-15) visits/engagements during this period. Although the cost rose by 6p during this period this development was cost neutral to the service.



### Customer Satisfaction

The Reminiscence resource service has ensured that older people in West Lothian, particularly those in a care environment, have access to reminiscence resources. This has encouraged communication and raised self-esteem. Participants have also found reminiscence enjoyable.

West Lothian Council reports a year on year increase in the percentage of adults satisfied with museums and galleries reaching the Scotland average.



### Wider reach

More recently the Reminiscence shop has allowed the Museum Service to engage with new audiences who would not normally visit a museum. This has brought 1160 additional engagements in 4 months.

### Cost savings and local investment

For 75% of the time the shop is staffed by the LMA; this has made the majority of engagements cost neutral to West Lothian Council. Local people support the reminiscences project and sometimes their families donate resources when they pass away. This act of kindness allows the addition of new collections at no extra cost.

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## Key Activities

The environment of tight budgets can present operational challenges. However, the exploration of new ways of doing things and the development of partnerships can actually provide opportunities for innovation and engagements.