

Committee(s)	Dated:
Keats Consultative Committee – For Information	27/10/2016
Subject: Keats House Progress Report 2016/17	Public
Report of: Director of Culture, Heritage and Libraries	For Information
Report author: Frankie Kubicki, Senior Curator, Keats House	

Summary

This report summarises achievements and developments at Keats House since the last Keats House Consultative Committee meeting in June 2016 and provides an overview of performance and programmes for the first six months of the financial year, including statistical data relating to footfall and income.

While the House continues to show good signs of growth in the areas of income and education, there was a small decrease in visitor figures during the period covered. This is consistent with the planned reduction of events and the decision not to host a Keats Festival in 2016.

Recommendation(s)

The Consultative Committee is asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Current Position

1. Keats House has seen community engagement increase during 2016/17 through the success of its youth and educational projects. Visitor figures have however decreased in comparison to 2015/16 while income has held steady. Key achievements are summarised below:

Visitor figures

2. Total visitor numbers to the House (excluding the garden) for the first six months of 2016/2017 were down by 2.5% (11,700 visitors compared to 12,006 visitors for the same period last year).
3. Total numbers to the House and Garden for the first half of 2016/2017 were also down but by a slightly smaller margin of 2% (19,670 visitors compared to 20,073 during the same period last year). Likely explanations for this decrease include:

- a. A planned reduction in the events programme while alternative models for running Keats House were investigated as part of the corporate-wide Service Based Review (SBR);
 - b. The absence of a summer Keats Festival, which is ordinarily an important engine for PR and the promotion of Keats House; and
 - c. The decision not to appoint a new Poet in Residence during 2016 noting that s/he ordinarily generates good PR and leads on curating or facilitating high profile events which generate income from ticket sales.
- 4. The above decisions were taken due to uncertainty around the outcome of the Service Based Review and the savings the House has needed to realise and temporarily reduced staffing while an Interpretation Officer was on maternity leave.
- 5. One hundred and twenty two visitors have visited the house as part of the London Pass scheme during the first six months of this financial year. Keats House has signed up to be part of the scheme again in 2017/2018.
- 6. Keats House has re-joined the National Trust partnership scheme at an increased and renegotiated rate of £3.25 for every adult visit. This popular scheme markets partners to its 4 million London members and will, it is hoped, have an impact on visitor figures and income from January 2017 onwards, when the new arrangements come into force.

Extended Opening Hours

- 7. The House has reviewed its opening hours and will be open five days a week (11am - 5pm, Wednesday to Sunday) throughout the winter period. This compares to seasonal opening hours during the winter of 2015/2016 of 3 short days a week (1 to 5pm, Friday to Sunday). The aim of this change is to increase visitor figures and income while aligning with a change in management of London National Trust properties, which have also stopped operating on reduced winter hours.

Open House

- 8. On the weekend of 18 and 19 September Keats House took part in Open House London. Opening for free, and running a series of special architectural tours, the event was very popular and saw 1,132 visits the House over the weekend. This was a 565% increase on the 170 visitors who visited over the same weekend in 2015/2016.

Events

- 9. The events programme continues to attract a large and diverse audience, despite having been scaled back during the early part of the year for the reasons outlined above. Since April 2016, Keats House held 35 events and welcomed to 2,463 visitors. Upcoming highlights include a celebration of Regency food with popular broadcaster and food historian Dr Annie Gray as part of *Museums at Night*, and new evening candlelit tours over the Christmas period. A renewed focus on income-generation has seen ticket prices increase to achieve cost recovery and improve profit margins.

Staff changes

10. Vicky Carroll's secondment as Acting Head of the Guildhall Art Gallery and London's Roman Amphitheatre will be extended until the end of February 2017. Thereafter, she will return to Keats House as Principal Curator. Frankie Kubicki will stay in post as Senior Curator during Vicky's absence.
11. Sofie Davis will return to her post as an Interpretation Officer on the 1 November 2016 on a part time capacity, working 18 hours per week following Maternity Leave.
12. Eva Bentcheva will continue as an Information Officer until the 3 January 2017. This position will be on a part time basis of 17 hours per week from 31 October. A post for a new part time Interpretation Officer will be advertised internally during December 2016.

Learning

13. Charges of £3 per child were put in place from September 2016. The charge helps to secure extra income from this stream of activity and reflects a change in the sector aligning it with most other cultural venues which now charge for such sessions.
14. School figures continue to increase. From April to October 2016, Keats House welcomed 469 primary school children compared to 257 children during the same period in 2015/2016, an increase of 82%.
15. Keats House will take part in this year's *Young City Poets* initiative with the National Literacy Trust. The London-based project provides opportunities for schools to visit London's cultural assets and work closely with a writer. Four school groups will visit the House in January 2017 as part of this programme.
16. The House will be part of *Google Expeditions*, Google's new initiative to create virtual trips for schools using Google cardboard virtual reality headsets and smartphone technology. This virtual tour is in the production stages after images of the House were taken in August 2016.

Retail

17. Retail performance is holding steady despite the slight decline in visitor numbers. Income for the first six months of 2016 totalled £14,590 compared with £14,417 for the same period in the previous year.
18. Improvements to shop stock continue to be made and new children's products have been introduced including a soft toy nightingale. The House has also developed new necklaces with popular UK brand Sugar & Vice.
19. The House will receive a new till and customised EPOS system in October 2016 as part of a department-wide initiative led by Tower Bridge. This system should benefit Keats House with more detailed business reporting, and a streamlined stock keeping system that will be less time consuming.

Venue hire

20. Income from venue hire continues to show good signs of growth. From April 2016 to October 2016, the House raised nearly £8,964 from venue hire compared with £4,363 for the same period last year, an increase of 105%.

PR and marketing

21. Keats House will feature on the popular BBC tea time show, *The One Show* this autumn. The feature, which focuses on John Keats's poem, *To Autumn*, includes an interview with Senior Curator, Frankie Kubicki, and cricketer, Phil Tufnell (date to be shown TBC).
22. Frankie Kubicki, and long-standing Volunteer and Tour Guide, Elizabeth Hansford were interviewed by *The Poetry Programme* radio show. To be aired on RTE Radio 1 (Ireland's version of the BBC), the feature will be broadcast in October 2016 (date TBC).
23. Film production and online media company Geocast TV have been contracted to produce a short online promotional film for the House. The film was shot in September 2016 and is currently in post-production. It will be promoted through www.BritainisGreat.com which receives 2 – 4 million unique views a month. The film will also feature on the Keats House website.

HLF funded Young Roots project in partnership with Jackson's Lane:

OMG Keats!

24. The first phase of the above project, the *Keats House Slam*, saw 40 young performers take to the stage in the garden of Keats House on 31 July 2016. The event attracted an audience of around 200 people, and received a full page spread in popular local paper the *Ham and High*.
25. Preparations for the second stage of the project, a half-term filmmaking course with Chocolate films, are underway with the course taking place in the week commencing 24 October. The project will culminate in the creation of a short film for young people, exploring Keats's life.

Grants

26. Keats House has been awarded a grant of £500 by the Museum Development Fund to purchase three new Tiny Tag environmental monitors.

Fundraising

27. A number of changes have been made to strengthen the House's Supporters Group and increase income. Admission tickets can no longer be reused for a period of a year to help ensure they are not transferred between visitors, and make the benefits of the Supporters Group more attractive. Keats Foundation members will receive a discount of 50% when they purchase admission tickets in place of free entry.

Awards

28. Keats House is delighted to have been awarded a 2016 certificate of excellence from Tripadvisor for receiving consistently highly-rated reviews.
29. Keats House has been nominated for a *Time Out* Love London Award 2016.

Building maintenance

30. Keats House has had on-going issues with the working capacity of the House boiler since a new boiler was installed in March. The boiler failed on several occasions due to faults with the flue. A new flue was installed in October 2016.
31. A number of CCTV system parts had to be renewed during the first half of the year. The system was fully functional by October 2016.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Keats House is highly-regarded, award-winning visitor attraction and contributes significantly to the City Corporation's good reputation as a responsible steward of heritage assets, a provider of world-class education programmes and a valued investor in London's cultural and visitor landscape.

Conclusion

32. Keats House remains a popular visitor attraction despite reductions in its programme of activities and the resultant drop in footfall. Its outreach and education programmes are accessed more than ever and show its significant value to the heritage sector and London schools and communities.
33. The House is recognised through awards and grants, and its income through hire and retail is growing, helping to build a robust and sustainable model for the future.

Appendices

- None

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