

Minutes

The British Museum Board Meeting 29 June 2023

Held at the British Museum and via MS Teams

Present

Mr George Osborne (Items 1-3 and
4.2-18) Chair
Professor Abhijit Banerjee
Professor Dame Mary Beard
(online)
Dame Elizabeth Corley
Ms Clarissa Farr
Professor Chris Gosden
Ms Muriel Gray
Dame Vivian Hunt (online)
Sir Charlie Mayfield
Mr Mark Pears (Items 1-10, online)
Sir Paul Ruddock
Baroness Minouche Shafik (online)
Mr Alejandro Santo Domingo (Items
3-18)
Mr Weijian Shan (Items 1-7, online)
Ms Priyanka Wadhawan
Professor Sir Mark Walport
Mr George Weston
Professor Dame Sarah Worthington

In Attendance

Hartwig Fischer (Items 1-17)
Director
Jonathan Williams (Items 1-17)
Deputy Director
Christopher Yates (Items 1-17)
Deputy Director
Jane Whittaker (Items 1-3)
Director of Resources
Eoin Martin (Items 1-17)
Governance Manager
Head of Internal Audit (Item 3)
Kary Kelly (Items 4-7)
Director of Advancement
Jill Maggs (Items 5-7)
Director of Public Engagement

The Hon. Nigel Boardman (Item 3)

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies had been received from Philipp Hildebrand and Lord Marland.

2. Declaration of Interests

- 2.1 George Osborne had declared a conflict of interest in relation to the Board's discussion of a potential corporate sponsorship proposal and confirmed that he would withdraw during this item. He had asked Charlie Mayfield, in his capacity as chair of the Masterplan Committee, to chair this item in his place. Philipp Hildebrand had also determined earlier to recuse himself from discussion of this matter given his business interests, but now could not be present for any items. Some Trustees indicated strong personal disagreement about accepting money from companies in the sponsor's line of business, but resolved that these were not such as to require them to recuse themselves from acting as trustees in the decision to be made.

Discussion and Approval

3. Collection update

- 3.1 Vivian Hunt briefed the Board on a discussion by the Audit Committee relating to the security of the Collection and Nigel Boardman and Christopher Yates gave an overview of workstreams related to this work. A detailed discussion followed. The Board approved recommendations made by the Audit Committee related to the security of the Collection. It was agreed that the Board would be kept updated on this work.

Action: Vivian Hunt

4. Fundraising

The Chair withdrew for item 4.1 and asked Charlie Mayfield to assume the Chair.

- 4.1 Charlie Mayfield opened the item by summarising discussions of the potential corporate sponsorship at a meeting of the Standing Committee on 27 April and a meeting of the Board on 1 June.

Having previously considered advice and papers from the Museum's Executive that the proposed sponsorship would significantly support the Museum's Masterplan, delays to which would increase risk to safety (people and property) and to the collection due to the deteriorating condition of the fabric and infrastructure of parts of the Bloomsbury estate, the Trustees considered a number of further papers. These papers included an analysis of the risks of accepting or declining the sponsorship, which included an assessment of the Museum's finances; polling on public attitudes towards different sources of funding; an open letter to the Trustees [*dated April 2022 and signed by a number of environmental groups, including Culture Unstained*]; and a number of independent assessments of the sponsor's track record and plans for energy transition. Some concerns were expressed about recent watering down of the sponsor's own energy transition plans, although recognising this was accompanied by maintained or improved positions in other respects. It was also noted that the sponsor's energy transition plans were independently assessed to be among the most advanced within the sector. This and their expertise aligned with the ambition of the Masterplan to reduce the carbon footprint of the Bloomsbury estate.

After considering the Museum's acceptance of donations and sponsorship policy, the Trustees had a detailed discussion of the benefits and risks of either declining or accepting the proposed sponsorship, including, in declining, the risk to the collection and its continued accessibility, and, in accepting, the risk and security implications for people and the collection in light of the increase in protests against climate change.

During an extended discussion of the proposed sponsorship, some Trustees repeated their personal disagreements with accepting funding from such sponsors. However, acting as Trustees, and noting their desire to operate as a united board on this matter, it was unanimously agreed that accepting the sponsorship was on balance in the best interests of the Museum and the protection, display and use of its collection. It was agreed that the Museum's Executive would circulate the final version of the sponsorship arrangement and would revert with further advice on the security of the collection and related issues before the arrangement was formalised. The Executive would at the same time also bring proposals for the best means of communicating this, in alignment with the corporate sponsor.

Action: Kary Kelly

- 4.2 The Board considered the annual donations report for the financial year 2022/23 and carried out an annual review of the Museum's acceptance of donations and sponsorship policy. The Board reaffirmed its approval of the policy.

5. Vision development

- 5.1 The Trustees commented on the outcomes of the vision development project carried out by Wonderhood Studios. The Board approved the vision proposal and it was agreed that its implementation would be considered in detail as part of discussion of the Masterplan at the October Board meeting.

Action: Kary Kelly, Jill Maggs

6. Digital

- 6.1 Jill Maggs outlined the outcome of work carried out with McKinsey & Co. on a digital strategy for the Museum. The Board approved the principles of the recommended approach. It was agreed that the Board would discuss the resource implications of this at its October meeting.

Action: Jill Maggs

7. Masterplan

- 7.1 Charlie Mayfield provided an update on preparations to launch an architectural competition. It was agreed that this would be discussed at the October Board meeting.

Action: Charlie Mayfield

8. British Museum Annual Report & Accounts

- 8.1 The Board noted the Audit Committee annual report.
- 8.2 The Board noted the Auditor's Report and, on the recommendation of the Audit Committee, approved a letter of representation for signature by the Chair and the Director.
- 8.3 On the recommendation of the Audit Committee, the Board approved the Museum's Annual Report and Accounts for 2022/23 for signature by the Chair and the Director

on receipt of ministerial approval.

Action: Chair, Director

Item 9 constituted a meeting of the Board of the British Museum Friends.

9. British Museum Friends (BMF) Annual Report & Accounts

- 9.1 The BMF Board noted the BMF Audit Committee annual report.
- 9.2 The BMF Board noted the Auditor's Report and, on the recommendation of the BMF Audit Committee, approved a letter of representation for signature by the Chair.
- 9.3 On the recommendation of the BMF Audit Committee, the Board approved the Annual Report and Accounts for 2022/23 for signature by the Chair and the Director.

Action: Chair, Director

10. Loan approvals

- 10.1 The Board approved loans to the National Museum of Korea, Seoul; the Royal Academy of Arts, London; the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai; and the Teylers Museum, Haarlem. The Board also approved an amendment to the dates of a previously agreed extension to the Getty Villa, Los Angeles.

11. Register of Interests

- 11.1 The Board approved a recommendation that the Register of Interests relating to the Trustees and senior members of the Museum Executive henceforth be published on the Museum's website.

Action: Governance Manager

Standing Business

12. Minutes

- 12.1 The minutes of the Board meetings held on 23 March and 1 June 2023 were approved as a true record of the meeting.

13. Chair's Report

- 13.1 The Chair noted the potential, following an election in Greece, that its government would seek to resume discussions regarding the Parthenon Sculptures. He noted that he would keep the Board updated of any developments.

14. Management Report

- 14.1 The Board noted the report. The Director updated the Board on a large-scale EU/Africa ethnographic collaboration project, noting that the Museum is on the Steering Committee and that the project was in the process of being submitted to the EU for funding approval.

15. Committee Reports

- 15.1 The Chair provided an update on the Nominations and Remunerations Committee and noted that the Government was expected to launch a recruitment campaign for four vacancies on the Board, which would be appointed by the Prime Minister.

Information

16. Committee minutes

- 16.1 The Board noted the minutes of the Nominations and Remuneration Committee meeting on 8 December 2022, the Standing Committee meeting on 19 January 2023, and the Audit and Risk Committee meeting on 31 January 2023.

17. Any other business

- 17.1 There was no other business before the closed session.

The Director, Deputy Directors and Governance Manager left the meeting.

18. Closed session

- 18.1 The Board held a discussion session without the management team present.

_____Chair

Date of next meeting: 7 October 2023