

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 2 June 2020

Report of: Camilla Hampshire, Museums Manager

Title: Collections Development Policy RAMM (2020–25)

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive

1. What is the report about?

This report sets out the requirement to approve a new Collections Development Policy for the Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery to cover the years 2020 to 2025. Due to the exceptional circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown this policy has not undergone the customary period of consultation with professional colleagues and may be subject to later amendment. It also includes an interim guidelines on dealing with repatriation requests, pending new guidance which will be issued by Arts Council England later in 2020.

2. Recommendations:

That the new policy is formally adopted by Exeter City Council.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

A Collections Development Policy approved by a museum's governing body is a requirement of Museum Accreditation, which is the UK standard for museums and galleries. Only museums which hold Museum Accreditation may apply for major investment from Arts Council England and most other sector funding bodies.

4. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources.

The purpose of a Collections Development Policy is to determine the nature, extent and sustainability of a museum's collecting. Museums are defined as organisations that collect, and collections are at the heart of RAMM's activities, yet all new acquisitions must be made with an awareness of the long-term resource implications involved in their conservation, display, storage and management. The policy articulates in what circumstances it is appropriate to make acquisitions and when it is appropriate to dispose or transfer accessioned objects to other institutions. RAMM does not have a fund for acquisitions and therefore all purchases are dependent on raising external funds.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

There are no additional financial implications for Council to consider in this report. It must be noted, as set out above that the Museum does not have a budget for new acquisitions and therefore any new acquisitions should really be approved by full Council even when

externally funded to both set a budget for acquisition and to ensure that the whole life cost is considered and understood.

6. What are the legal aspects?

As stated above, the new Collections Development Policy is essential in order to inform the process to be followed in relation to the museum's collections. In the event that the policy is not adopted there is a real risk that the museum could lose its Museum Accreditation status with Arts Council England which is likely to result in the museum being unable to access Arts Council investment and grants in the future.

It will be noted that there are a number of pieces of legislation that regulate acquisitions and disposals made by UK museums. These include the Human Tissue Act 2004, the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act 2003 and the Treasure Act 1996. The museum maintains that it will not acquire by any direct or indirect means any specimen that has been collected, sold or otherwise transferred in contravention of any national or international wildlife protection or natural history conservation law or treaty of the United Kingdom or any other country. These statutory provisions are incorporated into the policy.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

It will be noted that the report is likely to require further amendment following the publication of new restitution and repatriation guidance by the Arts Council England later in 2020. Changes to guidance may be significant. In addition, in line with normal sector process associated with the agreement of Collections Development Policies, RAMM will consult with professional colleagues about the scope and detail of our policy. However this is only likely to be possible once other museums are back in operation following lockdown. In the event that the policy is amended it should be brought back to Executive for approval.

8. Report details:

- 8.1 The character and scope of a museum's collection is defined by its approach to acquisitions and the type and range of material it decides to collect, care for, and in certain limited circumstances, transfer or ethically dispose of. This is set out in a museum's Collections Development Policy (formerly known as an Acquisitions and Disposals Policy).
- 8.2 An approved Collections Development Policy is a requirement of Museum Accreditation, which is the UK standard for museums and galleries. Only museums which hold Museum Accreditation may apply for major investment from Arts Council England and other bodies.
- 8.3 An agreed policy allows RAMM to decline inappropriate gifts while focusing on making key acquisitions to improve the quality of collections and visitors' experience.
- 8.4 The policy includes general principles on strategic, ethical collecting and disposal, and subject statements for each of the collections: Antiquities (Archaeology), Contemporary Art, Costume and Textiles, Decorative Art, Ethnography (World Cultures), Fine Art, Natural Sciences, Numismatics (Coins), Photography and Social History.

- 8.5 There are a number of new elements and areas of development in the Collections Development Policy that build on work carried out since the last policy in 2014. These include:

Re-naming the Natural History collection Natural Sciences to better reflect its diversity and relationship with current global concerns, such as climate change (3.8)

Allowing for selective acquisitions of works by contemporary artists that specifically relate to RAMM's collections (4.3)

Photography, previously distributed among other collection areas, has been treated as a discreet entity following a collections review carried out by a V&A/Art Fund photography curator (3.10). Acquisitions will be sought that reflect clear priorities (4.9).

Social History, reflecting the history of Exeter and region from the 17th century, has been separated out from Antiquities (3.11). RAMM does not have the capacity to undertake large scale contemporary collecting; however, selective acquisitions can be made that reflect contemporary Exeter life (4.10). This allows for some collecting around, for instance, recent climate change protests or Covid-19 and the lockdown period.

In the Fine Art section, work by women artists will be prioritised as it has been identified as severely underrepresented in the current collection (4.7).

- 8.6 In addition to the policy there are three appendices. Appendix A and B are revised versions of documents that accompanied the last Collections Development Policy on the deposition of archaeological material from developer-funded excavations and on dealing with human remains. Appendix C provides interim guidance on dealing with requests for repatriation and restitution, as the museum sector is currently waiting for Arts Council England to substantially revise their current guidelines. (This has been in part driven by recent experience over the repatriation of Chief Crowfoot's regalia from RAMM.) Once the new guidance is received it will be incorporated into RAMM's Collections Development Policy.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

The decision to adopt the policy shows the council is well-run with effective governance and management of its valuable assets, both in a cultural and financial sense. RAMM's collections play a key role in the cultural life of Exeter, through displays and temporary exhibitions in the museum they attract visitors to the city centre. By developing collections that relate to Exeter and its citizens the museum helps promote community cohesion and establishing a sense of local identity.

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

If the proposed policy is not formally adopted by ECC there is a risk that RAMM could lose its Museum Accreditation status with Arts Council England. This would have dramatic consequences for future funding of the museum and its reputation.

If after consultation within the sector changes are required of the policy it will need to be returned for ECC scrutiny; however, as this policy has been written using Arts Council

England's current template and guidance and there are unlikely to be significant changes required.

11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

11.1 Under the Act's Public Sector Equalities Duty, decision makers are required to consider the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

11.2 In order to comply with the general duty authorities must assess the impact on equality of decisions, policies and practices. These duties do not prevent the authority from reducing services where necessary, but they offer a way of developing proposals that consider the impacts on all members of the community.

11.3 In making decisions the authority must take into account the potential impact of that decision in relation to age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), sex and gender, gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women and new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage and civil partnership status in coming to a decision.

11.4 In recommending this proposal potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act and an Equalities Impact Assessment has been included in the background papers for Member's attention.

12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

There are no direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendations.

13. Are there any other options?

No. To achieve Museum Accreditation status museums must have a Collections Development Policy agreed by their governing body.

Jon-Paul Hedge, Director
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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

- RAMM's Collections Development Policy 2020–25
- Appendix A: Archaeological Archives Deposition 2020
- Appendix B: Human Remains Policy 2020–25
- Appendix C: Guidelines on the procedure for dealing with repatriation and restitution of objects

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