

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 16 December 2025

REPORT TO COUNCIL

Date of Meeting: 13 January 2026

Report of: Strategic Director of Place

Title: RAMM Collections Development Policy (2026-30)

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

1.1 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 2026 to 2030. It is anticipated that the outcome of Local Government Reorganisation will require the CDP to be revised and approved by the appropriate governing body before its stated end date. Arts Council England have advised for the purpose of Accreditation, museums affected by LGR should make their submissions based on their current arrangements.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 That Executive recommends that Council approve the Royal Albert Memorial Museum Collections Development Policy 2026-30.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

3.1 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

4.1 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.

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5. Section 151 Officer comments:

5.1 There are no additional financial implications contained in this report.

6. What are the legal aspects?

6.1 National and international legislation regulate acquisitions and disposals made by museums in the United Kingdom including the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) 1973, Treasure Act 1996, Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act 2003, Human Tissue Act 2004 and the Ivory Act 2018. The purpose of the proposed policy is to ensure that Exeter City Council, through the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM), will not acquire, either directly or indirectly, 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, unless given to the museum by a relevant authority. The attached policy seeks to set out Exeter City Council's approach, via RAMM, to the acquisition and disposal of items in order to comply with national and international law.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

7.1 Members will note the purpose of the proposed policy in order to ensure that Exeter City Council is legally compliant in the museum acquires and disposes of acquisition of items.

8. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

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

8.2 By developing collections that relate to Exeter and its citizens the museum helps to promote community cohesion and establish a sense of local identity. The updated policy sets out priority areas for collecting to achieve this by redressing historic collecting biases and ensuring contemporary society is accurately reflected. Inclusive and relevant collections enable visitors, both physical and virtual, to better engage with RAMM and benefit from role the museum plays within the city.

8.3 RAMM's Collections Development Policy will affect people within the protected characteristics of disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, ethnicity, religion, sex and sexual orientation. It will do this by actively acquiring collections that better reflect the diversity of contemporary Exeter and historical objects that encourage discussion of groups within society that have previously been marginalised.

8.4 All potential new RAMM acquisitions are discussed at fortnightly Collections Team meetings to ensure any objects entering the collection meet the criteria set down in the Collections Development Policy. RAMM will record instances when potential acquisitions falling into the categories outlined in 8.3 are brought to the meeting and document the reasons when not agreeing to accept these objects for the collection.

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9. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

9.1 There are no direct carbon/environmental implications for the decision. However, RAMM is mindful that the long-term storage requirements associated with particular objects may have an impact on energy usage and this will be borne in mind when making decisions on new acquisitions.

10. Report details:

10.1 RAMM's collection numbers over a million individual objects from all over the globe, ranging from geological specimens millions of years' old to contemporary art. The collections have been built up since the 1860s and contain groups of outstanding historical and cultural importance.

10.2 The entire World Cultures collection received Designated status in 1998 in recognition of its international significance. Highlights include a Tahitian mourner's costume from the 1790s, artefacts from Captain Cook's second and third voyages and Richard Denett's objects acquired in the Congo region in the nineteenth century.

10.3 The Natural Science collections include George Montagu's molluscs which were Designated in 2020, as well as Percy Salden's echinoderms (starfish and related creatures), which is one of the best collections of its type in the UK, and over 12,000 birds including great rarities, such as moa, ivory-billed woodpecker and passenger pigeon.

10.4 The long history of archaeological investigation in Exeter means that RAMM holds a unique record of historic artefacts found in the city. This legacy is continually supplemented by new finds and acquisitions, such as an exceptionally rare silver penny of Alfred the Great minted in Exeter which entered the collection in 2025.

10.5 The Costume and Textiles collection consists of about 24,000 objects mostly with strong local connections which ensure it is rated as one of the top ten in Britain. The Treadwin and Bury Palliser lace collections are particularly significant and were among the first groups acquired by RAMM.

10.6 Highlights in the Fine Art collection include eighteenth-century watercolours by local artists Francis Towne and John White Abbott; the famous 'Portrait of a Man in a Red Suit'; Batoni's Grand Tour portrait of John Rolle Walter; twentieth century works associated with the Bloomsbury and Camden Town schools of art; and drawings and sculpture by Dame Barbara Hepworth.

10.7 The museum's holdings of Devon silver are of international importance, and along with ceramics, glass, clocks and watches make up a Decorative Art collection of more than 2,000 items.

10.8 Given the size of RAMM's collections it is only possible to display a small percentage at any one time. Changes are made to displays as resources allow and stored objects are regularly used in temporary exhibitions. An in-house database includes information on all collections and about 20,000 object records are accessible via RAMM's collection website (rammcollections.org.uk). Physical access to collections is by appointment and store tours are regularly carried out for small groups.

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10.9 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).

10.10 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.

10.11 An agreed policy allows RAMM to decline inappropriate gifts while focusing on making key acquisitions to improve the quality of collections and visitors' experience.

10.12 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, World Cultures (Ethnography), Fine Art, Natural Sciences, Numismatics (Coins), Photography and Social History.

10.13 In addition to the policy there are three appendices. Appendix A provides guidelines for the deposition of archaeological material from developer-funded excavations. Appendix B on dealing with human remains and C on dealing with requests for repatriation and restitution.

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

11.1 RAMM directly contributes to two intended outcomes of ECC's strategic priorities. Within Local Economy it is integral to 'A vibrant cultural and tourism offer' and in People it plays an important role in 'A safe and thriving city with great things to see and do'. 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 to promote community cohesion and establish a sense of local identity.

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

12.1 Without an approved Collections Development Policy, RAMM would not meet the UK standard for Accreditation which creates the risk of losing critical funding sources and causing reputational harm to the city. Approving the policy allows RAMM to proceed with the Accreditation submission.

13. Are there any other options?

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

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

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List of Appendices:

- RAMM Collections Development Policy 2026-30
- Appendix A RAMM Archaeological Archives Deposition 2026-30
- Appendix B RAMM Human Remains Policy 2026-30
- Appendix C RAMM Repatriation and Restitution of Objects and Human Remains 2026-30
- EQIA RAMM Collections Policy