

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ECONOMY 16 JANUARY 2014

**EXECUTIVE
21 JANUARY 2014**

NEW RAMM COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT POLICY 2014-2019

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Committee approval for a proposed new RAMM Collections Development Policy, to cover the period 2014-19.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The character and scope of any 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, ethically dispose of. This is set out in a museum's Collections Development Policy which has been circulated separately, but is also available on request and on the City Council's web site. Formerly known as an Acquisitions and Disposals Policy, the new title reflects a more strategic approach to shaping collections.
- 2.2 The need for a more strategic approach is informed by recent changes in the cultural sector and beyond, which have led to increased questioning of the virtue of holding large reserves of objects and specimens with limited long-term potential for research or visitor engagement.
- 2.3 Funding for new acquisitions is likely to be limited between 2014 and 2019. An agreed policy allows RAMM to decline inappropriate gifts while focusing on making key acquisitions to improve the quality of collections and visitor experience.
- 2.4 Between 2011 and 2013, RAMM carried out a wholesale review of its collections, known as a Collections Review. This review provided an objective assessment of the collection's strengths, weaknesses, gaps and potential. It led to a new set of themes and priorities for future collecting and disposal, which are included in the proposed new policy.
- 2.5 An approved Collections Development Policy is a requirement of Museum Accreditation, and 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.

3. PROPOSAL

- 3.1 The proposed new policy includes general principles on strategic, ethical collecting and disposal and subject statements for each of the collections (Antiquities, Ethnography, Fine and Decorative Art and Natural History). In addition, there are statements on cross-cutting themes such as social history.

3.2 New elements of the Collections Development Policy draw on the Collections Review and include:

- (i) Future priorities and plans for research into and improved access to less well-used collections, in order to maximise public benefit.
- (ii) Future priorities and plans for improving access to information about collections.
- (ii) Identified groups of material for rationalisation and disposal. Ethical disposal is now recognised as an appropriate measure when not driven by financial motives and when carried out in strict accordance with the Museums Association Code of Ethics and disposal procedures.
- (iii) An explicit statement enabling RAMM to acquire and on occasion accession (accept permanently into the collection) contemporary art.
- (iv) A statement on archiving digital media and user-generated content. It is proposed that, where it is appropriate to collect such material, it is archived but not accessioned and that no commitment to long-term preservation is made.
- (v) The proposed new policy also includes a guide to the conditions of deposit at RAMM of archaeological archives derived from developer-funded excavations (Appendix B). The new archaeological archives policy is the subject of a separate report.

4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The purpose of the Collections Review and new Collections Development Policy is to re-examine the nature, extent and sustainability of RAMM's collecting activity. This exercise along with our proposed new approach to archaeological archives is undertaken with specific awareness of the long-term responsibilities and resource implications involved in housing, management, care and conservation of our collections now and in the future.

5 RECOMMENDED

5.1 That Scrutiny Economy recommends approval by Executive of the new RAMM Collections Development Policy 2014-2019.

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

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None