

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

8TH JANUARY, 2009

REPORT OF CORPORATE MANAGEMENT TEAM

CABINET DECISION

Portfolio Culture & Leisure – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor M. Womphrey

STOCKTON COUNCIL MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RATIONALISATION

1. Summary

Stockton's Museum collections comprise some 65,000 - 100,000 objects. The bulk of collections are social history but there are notable fine art, weapons and archaeology collections. The collection is of variable quality with much duplication, it does not adequately tell the story of the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees, and we cannot adequately care for and display much of it.

The Stockton Museum Strategy, accepted by full Council in 2005, and Council's Adults, Leisure and Culture Scrutiny committee Preston Hall Museum study (2006) have both highlighted the need to rationalise (*find another use for, disperse or dispose of*) the museum collections. This paper seeks approval for the necessary Policy to implement and manage this process, and agreement on a method by which items recommended by qualified curatorial staff for rationalisation may be approved by Cabinet. The proposed method follows national Museums Libraries and Archives Association guidance. Items will be assessed against clear criteria and officers' recommendations will be presented to a Members Panel at quarterly meetings.

The 'Stockton Council Museums Collections Rationalisation Policy 2009-2012' is included as an appendix to this paper, and a summary is included under 'Detail'.

2. Recommendations

1. To seek acceptance and ratification of the 'Stockton Council Museums Collections Rationalisation Policy 2009-2012'.
2. To seek approval from Cabinet for the establishment of a Collections Rationalisation Members Panel, advised by officers, with delegated authority to agree the disposal or re-use of unwanted museum collections items, according to the criteria set out in the Stockton Borough Council Museums Collections Rationalisation Policy 2008 - 20012, through a series of quarterly meetings over the period 2009 - 2012.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

To ensure we have the right collection to tell the story of Stockton, to attract residents and visitors, to foster pride and deepen residents sense of their heritage and belonging, and to avoid keeping and caring for objects with little or no value or relevance which we do not have the facilities to display.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (**paragraph 8**) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

- in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;
- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.

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**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

STOCKTON COUNCIL MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RATIONALISATION

SUMMARY

Stockton's Museum collections comprise some 65,000 - 100,000 objects. The bulk of collections are social history but there are notable fine art, weapons and archaeology collections. Poorly-managed collecting, changes in collection targets and insufficient collections management - resulting in poor documentation and weak collection care - have all combined to produce an extensive collection, with variable quality and much duplication, which does not adequately tell the story of the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees.

The Stockton Museum Strategy, accepted by full Council in 2005, and Council's Adults, Leisure and Culture Scrutiny committee Preston Museum study (2006) have both highlighted the need to rationalise (*find another use for, disperse or dispose of*) the museum collections. This paper seeks approval for the necessary Policy to implement and manage this process, and direction as to the frequency and method by which items recommended by professionally qualified curatorial staff for rationalisation be approved by Council.

The 'Stockton Council Museums Collections Rationalisation Policy 2009-2012' is included as an appendix to this paper, and a summary is included under 'Detail'.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To seek acceptance and ratification of the 'Stockton Council Museums Collections Rationalisation Policy 2009-2012'.
2. To seek approval from Cabinet for the establishment of a Collections Rationalisation Members Panel, advised by officers, with delegated authority to agree the disposal or re-use of unwanted museum collections items, according to the criteria set out in the Stockton Borough Council Museums Collections Rationalisation Policy 2008 - 2012, through a series of quarterly meetings over the period 2009 - 2012.

DETAIL

1. Stockton's extensive museum collections are currently stored in more than 20 on- and off-site stores. The bulk of these items are social history; there are also some art, weaponry and archaeology collections of national importance. Previous lack of a clear rationale for collecting, changes in targets, and poor staffing have all contributed to a broad, somewhat unfocussed collection, with variable quality and extensive duplication, which does not adequately tell the story of Stockton-on-Tees.

2. The 'Stockton Museum Strategy', accepted by full Council in 2005, and Council's own Scrutiny Committee Study of Preston Hall Museum (2006) have both highlighted this need to rationalise the museum collections. Nationally museums have also been reviewing their use of collections, and the presumption against disposal of items from museum collections included in the Museums Association's 'Code of Ethics' was removed in October 2007. Rationalisation is now a growing trend amongst museum services, and is being encouraged as good practice: it is part of responsible management of resources.
3. Since 2005, Stockton Museum Service has carried out an inventory of existing collections (2005-7), to help us to know more about what we have, where it is, and its condition and relevance to the Borough's history. Through this and improved documentation, the Service is now in a position to see the areas where there are gaps in the collections, duplication and objects which do not match our collecting policies and priorities. It is now ready to begin the process of improving these collections, through rationalisation.
4. The decision to remove an item from the collection – for another use (such as handling or set dressing), dispersal or disposal – obviously requires substantial consideration; it is subject to codes and policies, including Stockton's Museum 'Acquisition and Disposal Policy', as well as clear industry guidance, including the Museums Association's 'Code of Ethics' and 'Disposal Toolkit', in addition to the rules of the Museums Libraries and Archives Council's Museum Accreditation Process. The process requires transparency in decision-making, clear record keeping, and sensitive handling. Decisions to dispose need to be made for sound curatorial reasons, for example because items
 - Do not match the collecting policy
 - Don't help us to tell the Stockton Story
 - Are of poor quality, or are duplicates
 - Can't be used or cared for by SBC, or
 - Would be more appropriate in another museum or institution
5. The rationalisation process in Stockton is planned to take place over the next three years (2009-12), and will apply to all areas of the collections. Each item will be considered on an individual basis, and recommendations to rationalise items will be made only after extensive investigation and consideration, including the legal status of objects, and following the clear criteria set out in the Policy. The process will ensure:
 - That all legal responsibilities are fulfilled;
 - That the sensitivities of donors are respected;
 - That the public retain confidence in Stockton Museum Service and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council as trustees of the Borough's heritage and history.
6. All recommendations will be subject to approval by the Collections Rationalisation Members Panel, comprising 6 members, made up of 1 each for Labour, Conservative, Lib Dem, TIA, IBIS, and BIA respectively, with delegated authority from Cabinet, as representatives of the Museum's Governing Body. It is anticipated that the Panel would meet on a quarterly basis to consider a list prepared by Collections Management staff and already approved by the Museums Service Manager. The process will be clearly recorded. Between a third and a quarter of the overall collection is likely to be subject to rationalisation (re-use, dispersal or disposal). This might equate to 1500 - 2000 items per Panel meeting.
7. The end result of this process will be to improve the quality of museum collections, and access to them. Some objects will continue to be used by the Service in Education or Handling collections; some will be passed on to other public institutions that will be able to make better use of them. Items that have deteriorated beyond use may be disposed of. Remaining collections will be better stored and documented, and housed in the new on-site Collections' Store, purpose-built as part of the Preston Hall Redevelopment Project (2009-2012). Following rationalisation, there will be room to collect new things, which fit our collecting policy, and which will be used in the new displays at Preston Hall Museum, also as part of the Museum Redevelopment Project.

8. Ultimately the Rationalisation process will ensure the Service has the right collections it can use to tell the story of Stockton, and for the people of the Borough to use to discover their community's history.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9. The costs of rationalisation process are modest and will be met through savings and normal Service budgets. However, the process will take a considerable amount of staff time and will be prioritised over other work during the period. In addition, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council has agreed to fund a post, employed through the Tees Valley Hub, to assist us.
10. Although down-sizing the collection may result ultimately in reduced collection care and storage costs, such financial benefits would be a side- effect of, rather than a reason for, rationalisation. Likewise, income generation is not, and under the guidelines covering Accredited museums, cannot be, a reason for rationalising objects from the collections. In the event of any monies being raised, guidelines state that such monies should be used to benefit the remaining collections. The costs of the purpose-built on-site collections store at Preston Hall Museum, ex-costs (£583,077) are included in the HLF-funded Preston Hall Development Project, which will be supplemented by the capitalisation of the Spence Bequest, subject to Cabinet approval (£350,000).

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

11. The relevant guidelines and legislation relating to the proper disposal of collections items will be followed. Where an item has been gifted to the Council with a covenant or conditions of bequest these will be considered on a case-by case basis.

RISK ASSESSMENT

12. Based on adherence to the guidelines and procedures referred to above, this Collections Rationalisation Report is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Regeneration and Transport – focused and effectively used collections will help us attract visitors to our facilities

Safer Communities – a strengthened sense of identity, belonging and pride in our communities, combined with education on connections with global communities over time, will encourage tolerant and cohesive communities.

Children and Young People – the better use of collections, in displays and handling items, will contribute directly to school and educational objectives.

Supporting Themes:-

Stronger Communities - a strengthened sense of identity, belonging and pride in our communities, combined with education on connections with global communities over time, will encourage tolerant and cohesive communities.

Older Adults – more effective telling of local and living history, through our focused collections, will help to foster intergenerational respect and understanding

Arts Leisure and Culture – the continued strengthening of the Museum Service is central to the achievement of the Arts, Leisure and Culture objectives.

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This report is not subject to an Equality Impact Assessment because the national Rationalisation guidelines have been designed to encompass equality objectives.

The rationalisation of Museum Collections will improve the ability of the Museum Service to utilise collections to illustrate the separate and connected histories of our communities, telling positive stories about culturally, socio-economically and geographically diverse groups and individuals. Assessment of items for rationalisation will include consideration of the communities to whom the items may relate. It is therefore the case that this policy will contribute positively to achieving the objectives of Equality Impact Assessment.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

The 2006 Adults Leisure and Culture Scrutiny Committee report on Preston Hall Museum, which recommended rationalisation of the collections, involved considerable public and elected member consultation.

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Background Papers

Stockton Council Museums Collections Rationalisation Policy 2009-2012

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

All wards affected

Property

The change in collections storage needs are addressed through the Preston Hall Redevelopment Plans which are at an advanced stage and which feature in the Council's Asset Management Plan.