

## **REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**28 AUGUST 2008**

### **MUSEUM ACQUISITION AND DISPOSAL POLICY 2008-12**

Report from: Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture

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#### **Summary**

The paper sets out the principles by which the Guildhall Museum will acquire and dispose of objects in its collection. The museum is required to update and receive Cabinet approval for its policy on acquisitions and disposal as one of the pre-requisites to achieving accreditation, the national standard for museums and good collection management. The assessment and inspection for continued full accredited status is due in early 2009.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

- 1.1 The Guildhall museum is one of the Council's main cultural and heritage assets and is an important aspect of the Council's developing cultural strategy and agenda. Accreditation will support the Council's cultural ambitions as set out in the Community Plan (policy framework).
- 1.2 There are no specific budgetary issues involved in the policy. The museum will only purchase new items in keeping with the policy and budget constraints of the Council, and must follow ethical standards in terms of any disposals. Therefore this is a matter for Cabinet.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1 The purpose of the Guildhall Museum, Rochester, is to collect, document, research, preserve, exhibit and interpret material evidence and associated information for the public benefit.

- 2.2 The full Acquisition and Disposal Policy is appended to this report. It follows a template established by the Museums, Library and Archive Council (MLA) and must be presented in a prescribed format. The MLA is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) whose wide-ranging portfolio includes museums and galleries.
- 2.3 The policy document is routinely reviewed and re-adopted every five years.
- 2.4 The MLA will be sent a copy of the revised policy and will consider it as part of the Guildhall Museum's bid for retaining its national accredited status when inspected early in 2009.
- 2.5 The policy document describes the main collections of the museum, category by category (i.e. archaeology, ethnography, social history, art, silver, natural history etc) and highlights those categories where the collection can be described as substantial and significant. The policy also sets out the criteria for any future acquisitions or disposals.

### **3. Options**

- 3.1 The policy does not offer options as such but has been informed by the basic principles of good museum and collections management.
- 3.2 No substantial changes are being made from the existing policy other than a greater intent expressed to devise proposals for some of the objects in the museum collection to be made more accessible, i.e. displayed in buildings other than the Guildhall, such as Upnor Castle, Gun Wharf and Eastgate House, subject to achieving the appropriate security and insurance arrangements.

Key policy as regards new acquisitions will involve:

- only augmenting the collection (by purchase, donation or bequest) where there is an existing strength to build on our reputation;
  - only augmenting the collection where the items have a strong local provenance and relevance and are of particular historic value;
  - collecting only those objects which are in excellent condition and suitable for display;
  - avoiding the collection of large objects which can not currently be displayed and will incur storage costs, unless they are of particular local value.
- 3.3 In terms of any disposals, there will need to be sound curatorial reasons for disposal of objects before consideration is given. The ultimate decision on any disposals will follow the policy guidance and will be made by reference to Cabinet.

- 3.4 Prior to a decision on disposal, the museum's curatorial staff will be required to establish legal ownership (in the case of donations) and whether the item was acquired through grant or external funding.
- 3.5 The museum will not undertake disposal of items motivated principally by financial reasons. The accreditation standard requires that any proceeds from disposal or sale will be ring-fenced and spent on museum developments and improvements. Cabinet would be guided by the requirements of the accreditation scheme but in such circumstances would exercise its the legal power to decide policy and procedure.

#### **4. Advice and analysis**

- 4.1 Underlying the policy is the fundamental objective that the Guildhall Museum should continue to acquire objects for the permanent collection in order to provide a full range of services and fulfil its responsibilities to both the residents of the area administered by Medway Council and the wider audience of museum visitors and researchers. Accredited museums act as a long-term guardian of collections that are in the public domain.
- 4.2 Notwithstanding the above, the museum will need however to take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as curatorial staffing resources, cost of storage facilities and capacity to display new items.
- 4.3 The Guildhall Museum will abide by the ethical codes recommended by the MLA and by good practice in museum management.

#### **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 The museum has taken account of the collecting policies of other local museums and other organisations collecting in the same or related areas or subject fields. It has consulted with a number of organisations where conflicts of interest may arise in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources. Particular reference has been made to the collections of the Historic Dockyard, the Royal Engineers Museum and Maidstone Museum.
- 5.2 This policy has been Stage 1 diversity-impact assessed. Key findings of the Diversity Impact Assessment screening process have been incorporated in the main body of the policy document (See 14.0). A full Diversity Impact Assessment is not required because the screening process has highlighted that there is nothing within the policy that could adversely impact on customers and service users due to their racial group, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion and other factors. The wide-ranging museum's collections are equally accessible to all users and strategies are in place, or being developed, to ensure that collections can be actively used and enjoyed by all

sections of the local community. An object-focussed outreach service is available for educational and community groups that are not able to visit the museum site. The museum service has conducted market research into its user base and profile and utilises comment cards, feedback forms and visitor survey questionnaires as a mechanism for capturing data about visitor interests, needs and requirements. Museum collections are actively used in the wider community and the museum service is using temporary displays and exhibitions as a means of showcasing the heritage of local minority groups. The museum service has contacts with minority groups in the community who could be consulted with for advice when key decisions are being made about new acquisitions or disposals.

## **6. Financial and legal implications**

- 6.1 There are no specific financial implications. The Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture has delegated authority to manage the museum, which would include the authority to incur expenditure on acquisitions within budget. However, the museum operates the following procedures with regard to acquisitions. For potential new purchases and acquisitions, the museum curator and assistant curator will have the discretion to spend up to £500 from the museum's Cumulative Purchase Fund on the acquisition of objects that are deemed to be of outstanding interest to the museum. Expenditure up to this level will also need to be approved in advance by the Head of Service. Purchase of items costing more than £500 for which there is budget is authorised by the Director of Regeneration Community and Culture, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder.
- 6.2 In making purchases, every effort will be made to minimise the cost to Medway Council by the use of grant-aid, private donations, discounts etc. Where necessary, independent advice will be sought from appropriate bodies or persons as to the suitability of the object for purchase and an estimate of a fair price.
- 6.3 There are a number of legal implications summarised in 6.7 below. The legal and legislative framework within which the museum service operates is embodied in the requirements of the Public Libraries Act of 1892 and the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.
- 6.4 The 1964 Act permits a local authority to provide, fund and maintain museums and art galleries within its administrative area; to charge admission fees (if appropriate), and to establish a fund for the purchase of exhibits.
- 6.5 The National Accreditation Scheme for Museums and Galleries is voluntary and therefore not legally binding. The scheme defines the agreed minimum standards that a museum should attain in all areas of museum governance and management; public access and services, and care and management of collections. Possession of Full

Accredited status by a museum service is universally regarded as a benchmark of efficiency and effectiveness, as well as a prerequisite for access to all major external sources of funding and grant aid.

- 6.6 The Council is an institutional member of the Museums Association and as such is encouraged to support and implement the ethical principles outlined in the Association's ***Code of Ethics for Museums: Ethical principles for all who work for or govern museums in the UK (2007)***. Ethical standards developed by the Museums Association have informed the National Accreditation Scheme for Museums and Galleries in the UK at an institutional level.
- 6.7 The National Accreditation Scheme dictates that museums applying for Full Accredited status sign-up to the requirement that in the unlikely event of objects or collections being disposed-of by sale ***The proceeds of a sale will be ring-fenced so it can be demonstrated that they are spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the Accreditation standard*** (See: Page 43 of the policy document.12.0 Disposal Procedures, paragraph J). This would normally mean re-investment in equipment or facilities that would improve the care of museum collections. The Accreditation standard is not legally binding on administering bodies. If such circumstances arose the requirements of the Accreditation standard would be taken into consideration, but under law it would be the responsibility of the Cabinet to decide what proportion of the sale proceeds would be ring-fenced for re-investment in the museum service. In the case of items donated to the museum, there may be restrictions on sale or on the subsequent use of the proceeds if an item is sold.

## **7. Recommendations**

- 7.1 The committee is asked to consider and comment on the Museum Acquisition and Disposal Policy 2008-2012 prior to submission to the Cabinet.

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### **Background papers**

Full policy document attached.

Guildhall Museum Mission Statement, Key Aims, and Acquisition and Disposal Policy 2001.

***Accreditation standard: The Accreditation Scheme for Museums in the United Kingdom.*** Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), 2004.

***Acquisition Toolkit: Guidelines for Museums.*** The Museums Association, London, 2004.

***Disposal Toolkit: Guidelines for Museums.*** The Museums Association, London, 2008.

***Code of Ethics for Museums: Ethical principles for all who work for or govern museums in the UK.*** The Museums Association, London, 2007.

***Museum Acquisition and Disposal Policy 2008-2012. Diversity Impact Assessment Stage 1 Screening report.*** 11 August 2008.