

**Title of meeting:** Culture, Leisure and Economic Development Decision Meeting

**Date of meeting:** 16 October 2020

**Subject:** Museum Collection Development

**Report by:** Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services

**Wards affected:** ALL

**Key decision:** No

**Full Council decision:** No

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**1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1 To update the Cabinet Member on activity relating to the development of the Council's Museum Collection to ensure it remains relevant to the City and its communities.

**2. Recommendations**

**It is recommended that:**

- 2.1 The contemporary collecting initiative focusing on Covid-19 and the experience of the city during lockdown is noted.**
- 2.2 The disposal of 'the mountain collection' from the City's Museum collection is approved.**
- 2.3 The review and rationalisation of the handling collection is noted.**

**3. Background**

- 3.1 The Council's Collection Development Policy sets out clearly the kind of material the museums service should be collecting. In the case of local history, objects should originate from the Portsmouth area, whether produced, collected or used by people or organisations with a substantial connection to Portsmouth. They should represent, document or illustrate the lives, cultural activity and aspirations of the people of Portsmouth and immediate region. Items may also show Portsmouth's role in national and international events and wider links through for example, twinning. Items will not be acquired when another museum has a better claim.

- 3.2 Care needs to be taken to ensure that the items acquired are relevant and contribute to telling Portsmouth's story as collections require large amounts of space for storage as well as resources to care for and display them.
- 3.3 Collections are a dynamic resource and are under constant review. Disposal is considered where the items do not meet the criteria of the collection development policy; they are not relevant or cannot be stored appropriately for example. In such cases the policy is to dispose of items by transfer to another accredited museum. Items in very poor condition may be disposed of appropriately or recycled where possible. All disposals from the Council's formally accessioned museum collections have to be approved by the museums governing body.
- 3.4 The collections development policy also makes reference to material acquired for handling purposes; ie not part of the council's accessioned collection. The disposal of items from this collection does not require oversight of the museum's governing body but is included here for information.

#### **4. Reasons for recommendations**

- 4.1 **Developing collections** through acquisition and disposal is routine practice for the museums sector. It ensures the collection remains focused and relevant. Items from the main museum collection will be offered to other accredited museums first in accordance with council policy. We are not seeking to sell items to generate funds.
- 4.2 **Collecting Covid-19** As soon as lockdown began the museums team in partnership with archives developed plans to collect objects and material related to Covid-19 to help us tell the story of the City and its residents during this period. So far we have been offered a wide range of material including art produced during lockdown, home-made face coverings, face shields produced by local companies and social distancing signage used by high street shops.
- 4.3 Most of our collecting has been as a result of social media appeals, and has been guided by our audiences after we asked them what they thought we should collect. We are also working in partnership with The News who are producing a special publication. We plan to produce a small exhibition in the near future.
- 4.4 Collecting objects during lockdown and social distancing while observing bio-security measures has been a new challenge for all museums. However it has been a valuable opportunity to collect objects that relate to major events that are happening now.
- 4.5 **The Mountain Collection** is a group of 719 domestic items mostly focusing on home lighting and cooking given to the museum by Mrs Mountain of Tunbridge Wells, Kent. The collection was acquired as a gift just after the Second World War as Portsmouth began to re-build its collection after much was destroyed after a bomb fell on the museum. At this time collecting was not guided by a policy and everything that was offered was accepted. Since then we have

acquired domestic items which are much more relevant to the city and have a Portsmouth provenance.

- 4.6 The collection therefore is without provenance, has no connection with Portsmouth and does not meet the criteria of the collection development policy. There is significant duplication within the collection with many similar items and the sheer number of objects means that it occupies large amounts of storage space. There is no merit in retaining this collection other than a handful of items that fill gaps or that we are unlikely to have the opportunity to acquire in the future. The collection includes a number of Firearms. These will be processed separately.
- 4.7 **The handling collection** consists of several thousand objects and occupies a considerable amount of space in the main museum store. Documentation levels vary, there is a backlog of unprocessed material and a large percentage of the collection has not been used for many years.
- 4.8 In January 2020 we appointed a temporary Cataloguing Assistant funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and in February began a review of the handling collection. This aims to locate and document all items in the collection, re-home or dispose of unwanted items and create a handling collection that is relevant, versatile, accessible and inspiring. New loans boxes will be produced to complement the existing Wonder Boxes for schools.
- 4.9 Decisions will be informed by each object's condition, provenance, usage over the past 10 years, potential as an educational resource and relevance to Portsmouth's accessioned collections. Unwanted items will be offered to other accredited museums or sold on eBay or at auction. A small percentage of items will be taken to charity shops and those in very poor condition will be disposed of appropriately or recycled where possible.
- 4.10 Audit have confirmed that we can dispose of items using eBay without offering them to other Council departments first. We are keeping a comprehensive record of what the handling collection contains and what happens to each item.

## 5. **Integrated impact assessment**

- 5.1 The report is about the implementation of previously approved policy. An integrated impact assessment is not therefore required.

## 6. **Legal implications**

- 6.1 The recommendations in this report are in accordance with the Council's collections development policy and no significant legal implications arise.

6.2 It is understood that a reasonable price will be sought for any items for disposal which are considered saleable and not required for transfer to another accredited museum.

**7. Director of Finance's comments**

7.1 It is accepted that any disposal of collection assets will be in accordance with financial rules.

7.2 All additional costs associated with the management of collections and any income derived from sales will be managed within existing budgets.

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Signed by:  
**Stephen Baily**  
**Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services**

**Appendices:       None**

**Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by ..... on .....

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Signed by:  
**Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Economic Development**