

Portsmouth Museum Service

Access Policy and Plan

1. Introduction

1.1 Portsmouth Museum Service is committed to equal access to our collections, spaces and activities for all members of society, regardless of their background.

1.2 The Museum Strategy 2021 says what we are doing and what we stand for. Our purpose is:

To give local communities and individuals the opportunity to engage with the city's amazing heritage and people, to tell their story, be inspired, learn new things, gain new skills and feel happier and more optimistic about the future.

1.3 We will do this by:

- Being inclusive and reaching all parts of the city and society
- Benefiting residents and communities - enhancing wellbeing, raising aspirations
- Working together - as a team, with communities, with partners
- Embracing new opportunities and being a catalyst for change
- Proving that we are doing it

1.4 We are part of Portsmouth City Council, so we are committed to making sure the way we work does not place people with disabilities at a disadvantage when accessing or purchasing services.*

2. Being inclusive and reaching all parts of the city and society

2.1 We recognise that there are multiple reasons why people may not be able to access the museum and its activities. Barriers can be physical, social or intellectual. There is no 'one size fits all' answer to breaking down barriers to access.

2.2 We endorse the 'social model' of disability**. It is the barriers put in place by society that create disability, rather than a person's impairment. We recognise that we have a responsibility not to put people at a disadvantage by our actions.

2.3 Access plan:

Our access plan is linked to our Customer Charter that outlines best practice in behaviour for all Museum Service staff and volunteers. All

members of staff and volunteers receive training in the Customer Charter. A copy of the charter can be found in Appendix A.

2.4 We will offer activities, projects and ways of engaging with the museum that are designed with the needs of specific audiences in mind. For example, British Sign Language tours of a museum, or free/low cost events.

2.5 When we are planning new projects, displays or activities we will carry out research to find out what might prevent people from accessing them. We will put this learning into practice and do our best to remove these barriers.

2.6 If the way we do something places a person with disabilities at a substantial disadvantage compared with someone who does not have disabilities, we will consider each request and make reasonable adjustments when they are needed.

2.7 We will write in plain English and share information in a way that is straightforward and easy to understand.

3. Benefiting residents and communities - enhancing wellbeing, raising aspirations

3.1 We believe that access to culture and heritage are important for people's health and wellbeing. By exploring their past and present people can feel better about themselves and more connected to their local community.

3.2 We recognise that as a local authority run museum, we have a responsibility to help the people of Portsmouth enhance their health and wellbeing.

3.3 Access plan:

We will run projects and activities that help people feel better about themselves and more confident of what they can achieve. When we are planning these activities we will consider: "How could this project enhance the wellbeing of people who take part?"

3.4 We will not expect people to come to a physical building to access our collections or activities. We will take them out into the local community, and offer virtual ways to access the museum online.

3.5 Our projects will be informed by the New Economics Foundation's '5 ways to wellbeing'. We will plan activities that encourage people to 'Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Learn and Give'.***

4. Working together - as a team, with communities, with partners

4.1 We believe that when we are planning a project or activity aimed at specific people, we should develop it in partnership with them to make sure it meets their needs. We should not make assumptions about what is the 'best' way to make something accessible without asking the people who will potentially access it.

4.2 Access plan:

We commit to 'co-creation', making sure that our audience are involved in developing projects, displays or activities.

4.3 We recognise that we don't have all the answers and will work with the local community and with experts to find out what works best. We will work with other departments within Portsmouth City Council to draw on their expertise and improve life for local residents.

5. Embracing new opportunities and being a catalyst for change

5.1 We recognise that the process of being accessible is never finished and that we need to constantly learn and change when it is needed. We recognise that museums can often tell the story of heritage and culture in ways that marginalise groups of people. They can recruit and train staff in a way that reinforces privilege and discourages diversity.

5.2 Access plan

We will identify and carry out training with staff and volunteers to make sure that they have the most up to date training in welcoming visitors from all backgrounds.

5.3 We will undertake an audit of our museum exhibitions, activities and collections with a cross cultural group of community members to explore how we can remove barriers to access.

5.4 We are a Disability Confident Employer.**** We support employees through the interview process and when they are in work.

5.5 When we are recruiting for new staff we will do so fairly and openly. We will not make hiring decisions based on qualifications if they are not relevant to the role. We will not offer unpaid internships.

6. Proving that we are doing it

We believe feedback and evaluation are a very important part of what we do. They help us to understand what works, what doesn't, and how we can change things to make them better. It also helps us show other

people what we are doing and demonstrate our commitment to getting things right.

7.1 Access plan

Every project we undertake will include a plan that says how we will evaluate it and how we will use any feedback to improve it. This will include how the project is accessible and if it improves the health and wellbeing of any participants. We will carry out evaluation at the start, middle and end of a project.

7.2 We will share our work and evaluation of our projects with people outside the museum service. For example, by sharing pictures of events online or 'case studies' of projects on our websites.

References

*<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/services/council-and-democracy/policies-and-strategies/reasonable-adjustments-policy-statement/>

**<https://www.scope.org.uk/about-us/social-model-of-disability/>

***<https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-yourself/five-ways-to-wellbeing/>

****<https://careers.portsmouth.gov.uk/>

Appendix A

Portsmouth Museums Customer Charter

At Portsmouth Museums and Visitor Services (PMVS) we aim to keep our customers at the heart of everything we do. We have agreed a Customer Charter that aims to deliver outstanding customer service and provide an enriching experience for all our visitors. We recognise that our visitors have choices about where they go and how they spend their time. We will actively seek to understand and address their needs so we may successfully engage large and diverse audiences in our offer. This charter applies to all our customers – general admissions visitors, booked education groups and corporate hire – whether to our Museums, or virtually via our websites or social media.

This Customer Charter governs the behaviour of all Portsmouth Museums and Visitor Services staff. Everyone has a role to play in putting our audiences at the heart of what we do.

1. We will give our customers a warm welcome and an excellent experience

When people choose to visit us, staff whatever their role will consistently show they care and will go the extra mile. We aim to give you a 'wow' in the welcome you receive and throughout your experience. We will make it clear we are pleased to help you. This will be seen in our smile, body language, friendly attitude and in our courteous, attentive and knowledgeable approach. We will ensure we can provide information and guidance about our museums and that we are readily distinguishable as staff or volunteers. We will be friendly and professional, be well presented and wear name badges. We will welcome all visitors courteously and without discrimination in relation to gender, sexual orientation, disability, race, religion or belief. PMVS staff will consider individual needs, be approachable, helpful, assertive and efficient in dealing with all enquiries, requests, bookings, correspondence and comments from visitors, giving our name when you contact us by telephone or email. We will remain calm and try to resolve any complaints on site at the time of the visit.

2. We will meet the needs of all our customers

In our Museums, wherever possible customers will have easy access to clean toilets, baby-changing facilities, lifts, buggy parks and cloakrooms. We will provide comfortable environmental conditions, a clean and litter-free building and grounds, and a safe, secure and accessible experience. There will be places to sit, rest and reflect. Cafés and shops will be good value for money and offer an appropriate range. Our offer will set high standards in service, quality and value. On the web, we will provide sites that are easy to use.

3. We will make it easy for our visitors to find their way around

In our Museums and on the web, visitors will find well-planned spaces and pages, clear signage and maps, and gallery names that make sense. We will use positive signage and information about how to get the best out of a visit. Staff and volunteers carrying out museum 'interactive walk throughs' will readily interact with visitors about exhibits creating a positive atmosphere whilst carrying out any necessary maintenance or health & safety checks.

4. We will encourage customer feedback, listen to it and act on it

We will provide a facility for customers to express their comments and points of view both during their visit as well as after. We will advise clearly the name and contact details (address, telephone and email) of the person to whom comments by visitors should be addressed. We will use our customer feedback to improve the service we deliver, and practise continuous improvement.

5. We will give our audiences access to our collections and exhibitions

We know that it is your collections we have in our care. We will ensure that we are available and contactable to answer enquiries about collections and to give people access to this, their heritage. We will design our offer, whether in our Museums or on the web, so that we put Portsmouth first. We welcome people of all generations and backgrounds; no-one will feel excluded. Our audiences will see themselves represented in our exhibits and programmes and on the staff; they will feel that they belong. We will consider the needs of visitors for whom English is not their first language and where appropriate make arrangements to enable them to be adequately informed to enjoy their visit.

6. We will be accurate, reliable, clear and consistent

The information we provide in the Museums, via telephone or email, on our websites or via social media, in our publications and in other products

will be accurate, reliable and understandable. If we are offering an opinion, we will make this clear.

7. We will make sure that our Museums are places where you can have a good time and learn something too

We will work to make sure that there are no barriers to a good experience, whether in our Museums or on the web. Exhibits and galleries will be well designed and well lit. If lighting needs to be at a low level to preserve the exhibits we will state the reasons clearly. Labels will make sense and be relevant and we will strive to ensure interactive equipment is in good working condition. Our galleries and exhibitions will be designed for a social experience, in which visitors can talk, interact and share. People learn in different ways and we will recognise this in the way we develop and deliver our cultural offer.

8. We will respect all our audiences for who they are and what they know

We will not patronise or baffle you. In everything we do, such as exhibits, labels, staff interactions or websites, we accept that people have different levels of knowledge and interest and we will design what we do to make our offer as accessible as possible. We will ask visitors regularly about their experiences with us and we will apply what we have learned to our work.

9. We will give our visitors choice and control

Visitors need to have some choice on how they navigate through the Museum, and in how they choose to experience an exhibition. We might suggest particular routes but recognise that some people might want to do things their way.

10. We want all our audiences to have an enriching experience with us

We would like visitors to take away more than memories of an enjoyable visit. We aim to give them a 'light bulb' moment, a sense of awe and wonder, a learning experience that is out of the ordinary and that they refer back to, an insight that helps them make sense of their world and enhances their lives. We will invest in our staff and volunteers to enable us to manage our museums in such a way as to ensure visitor safety, comfort and service by sustaining a high standard of maintenance, customer care, courtesy and cleanliness.