

Bath & North East Somerset Council

DECISION MAKER:	Cllr Patrick Anketell-Jones, Cabinet Member Economic Development	
DECISION DATE:	On or after 18 July 2016	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 2853
TITLE:	Adoption of Professional Standards	
WARD:	All	

AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM

List of attachments to this report:

- Annexe 1: Access Statement for Bath Record Office;
- Annexe 2: Access Statement for the Fashion Museum;
- Annexe 3: Access Statement for the Roman Baths;
- Annexe 4: Access Statement for the Victoria Art Gallery;
- Annexe 5: Museums Association 'Code of Ethics for Museums';
- Annexe 6: Heritage Services' Research Framework.

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 The report introduces three policy statements of best practice for museums and archives in respect of Accessibility, the 'Code of Ethics for Museums' and a Research Framework for Heritage Services.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That, on behalf of the Cabinet, the Cabinet Member adopt:
- a) The Access Statements for Bath Record Office, Fashion Museum, Roman Baths and Victoria Art Gallery;
 - b) The Museums Association's revised 'Code of Ethics for Museums';
 - c) The Heritage Services Research Framework.

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 3.1 There are no resource implications arising directly from the adoption of these policies. However the Accredited status enabled by the policies on accessibility can qualify the Council's museums and archives for grant aid from external

bodies. Heritage Services has benefited from grant-aid from these Accreditation-dependent sources amounting to £1,200,000 over the past seven years.

- 3.2 There are no financial or property implications that follow from the adoption of these professional standards.
- 3.3 The standards will be implemented by Heritage Services staff but this will involve no additional staff time. The Council employs suitably-qualified curators and archivists to implement the Policies.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The provision of museum and archive services by local authorities is a discretionary rather than statutory service. However this authority has important museum and archive collections which are used to deliver much-valued services to residents and visitors alike. The basis for the proposal is that the authority would wish to continue to observe best practice in the management of its museum and archive collections.
- 4.2 The Council holds important collections of historic material in its Museums and Record Office. Three of these collections – at the Roman Baths Museum, the Fashion Museum and Bath Record Office – have been ‘Designated’ as nationally / internationally important collections held in non-national institutions.
- 4.3 The Council has a good reputation for managing its museums and archives to high professional standards. All three policy statements under consideration here will enhance this reputation for best practice and will have positive implications for public access to the Council’s museum and archive collections and the information they contain.
- 4.4 In 2013 the Council adopted the Heritage Services Collections Development Policy which sets standards of collections management, care, acquisition and disposal.

5 THE REPORT

- 5.1 For convenience the three policy statements are introduced here under one cover report and are dealt with sequentially in the sections below.

Access Statements (Annexes 1 – 4).

- 5.2 Museum and record office governing bodies are required to meet minimum standards of collections care and development in order to qualify for the Government’s Accreditation standard. Accreditation marks governing bodies as worthy guardians of unique public collections of historic, artistic and archival material which they hold in trust for the public good, and is awarded on a three-year cycle.
- 5.3 Affording good public access to these collections is a condition of Accreditation. In 2015 the Victoria Art Gallery was given Accredited status by Arts Council England (ACE) on condition that it demonstrate that its governing body has adopted its accessibility statement. The same was not asked of the Fashion Museum in 2014 or the Roman Baths (also in 2015) and the reasons for this inconsistency are not understood. However it is likely that when the museums are required to reapply for

Accreditation in 2018, governing body endorsement will have become a standard requirement.

- 5.4 Accreditation of Archives has been overseen by The National Archives (TNA) since 2012 and the same requirement is likely to apply.

Museums Association revised Code of Ethics (Annexe 5).

- 5.5 Through Heritage Services the Council has been an institutional member of the Museums Association (MA) for many years. Since 1977 the MA has set out and periodically revised the professional code of ethics that guide museum staff and their governing bodies in making sound and ethical judgments in fulfilling the duty of trust placed in them by the public to whom our collections ultimately belong.
- 5.6 The MA formally adopted the revised Code of Ethics at its annual conference AGM in Birmingham in November 2015. The rationale and practicalities relating to the Code of Ethics are set out in the code itself at Annexe 2.
- 5.7 Although there is no equivalent statement yet for Archives it is possible that one may be drawn up in future. If it is, it is likely to establish very similar ethical standards.

Heritage Services' Research Framework (Annexe 6).

- 5.8 Museums and archives are knowledge-based sectors and the council is guardian of important museum and archive collections which it holds in trust for the public good. Museums and archives therefore have a responsibility to generate and increase knowledge about their collections so that the intellectual capital created can be shared in ways that provide individuals and communities with rewarding and inspiring experiences.
- 5.9 The Research Framework is a new policy document for which governing body endorsement is sought. It establishes parameters within which research may be undertaken by Council officers to increase knowledge about its buildings, monuments and collections and then disseminate it through its services for the public benefit. It describes the means by which individuals, organisations and communities may engage with the Council's heritage assets by undertaking research and it identifies priority areas where new research will be of greatest and most relevant use, to which students and volunteers seeking research topics may be steered.
- 5.10 In 2015 the Victoria Art Gallery applied for Designated status (national / international importance) for its collections of local views and portraiture, both being strong primary sources of information about the 'City of Bath' World Heritage Site. The Designation Committee turned down the application, citing as one reason the lack of a policy on research into its collections. This situation not only needs to be redressed but the decision could indicate that in future applications for other awards or grants may be strengthened by having a research framework in place.

6 RATIONALE

- 6.1 Adopting these policies would keep the authority in line with best practice and maintain its reputation as a good custodian of important museum and archive collections.
- 6.2 Loss of 'Accredited' status would render the museums and archives ineligible for grant-aid from numerous sources. It would mean that the Council's museums no longer attain the minimum national standards for museums and they would lose credibility in their community leadership role amongst the many other museums on Bath and North East Somerset.

7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 None.

8 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The Access Statements have been drawn up in line with the Council's own access policies and statements. They have also been informed by feedback from service users over a long period of time.
- 8.2 The Museums Association revised Code of Ethics is the result of an 18-month period of consultation during 2014/15 involving people from across the museums sector, funders, interest groups, members of the public and other stakeholders.
- 8.3 The Research Framework has been drawn up in line with national best practice. It draws upon the experiences of and feedback from a wide range of professional, academic and volunteer service users over a long period of time. Special mention should be made of the role of the Friends of the Victoria Art Gallery in this process.
- 8.4 The Cabinet Member for Economic Development has been consulted during the preparation of this report.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 9.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.
- 9.2 There are no financial risks attached to adopting these policies. There is a risk that at some point in the future the Council could attract an adverse reputation for not having these policies in place.

Contact person	Stephen Bird, Head of Heritage Services 01225 477750
Background papers	December 2013 Cabinet: Heritage Services Collections Development Policy (E2597).
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