

CABINET

11 June 2012



Report of: Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee - Museum and Art Gallery Collection Working Group

Subject: FINAL REPORT INTO 'THE BOROUGH COUNCIL MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY COLLECTION'

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To present the findings of the Museum and Art Gallery Collection Working Group following its investigation into the Borough Council Museum and Art Gallery Collection.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 At the meeting of this Committee on 24 June 2011, Members determined their work programme for the 2011/12 Municipal Year. The issue of 'The Borough Council Museum and Art Gallery Collection' was selected as the Scrutiny topic for consideration during the Municipal Year. Members agreed that the investigation be undertaken through the formation of a Working Group.

3. OVERALL AIM OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

3.1 The overall aim of the Scrutiny investigation was to better understand the nature of the Museum and Art Gallery collections held within the possession of the Council.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

4.1 The following Terms of Reference for the investigation were agreed by the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee on 2 September 2011:-

- (a) To gain an understanding of the range, relevance and value of the Museum Service collections held by the Council and the ongoing costs to maintain/store the collection;
- (b) To explore the current status of the collections, their use, educational impact, distribution/location and the processes and procedures for accessioning/archiving artefacts; and

- (c) To explore the potential options for the future of the collection, taking in to consideration the legal status, ethical considerations and challenging budget situation that the Authority faces.

5. MEMBERSHIP OF THE MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY COLLECTION WORKING GROUP

- 5.1 The membership of the Museum and Art Gallery Collection Working Group was as detailed below:-

Councillors Cook, Griffin, James, Loynes, Preece, Thomas and Wilcox

6. METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

- 6.1 Members of the Museum and Art Gallery Collection Working Group met formally from 23 September 2011 to 16 March 2012 to discuss and receive evidence relating to this investigation. A detailed record of the issues raised during these meetings is available from the Council's Democratic Services.

- 6.2 A brief summary of the methods of investigation are outlined below:-

- (a) Presentations by officers from the Child and Adult Services Department supplemented with verbal evidence;
- (b) Site visit to the Museum of Hartlepool and Sir William Gray House / Stores to look at the Museum Collection; and
- (c) Visit to the Civic Centre Strong Room to look at the Civic Collection;

7. FINDINGS

THE RANGE, RELEVANCE AND VALUE OF THE MUSEUM SERVICE COLLECTIONS AND THE ONGOING COSTS TO MAINTAIN/STORE THE COLLECTION

- 7.1 Members welcomed evidence from the Assistant Director of Community Services, who provided information on the range and relevance of the collection; the value of the collection; and the costs of storage and maintenance of the collection.

Range and Relevance of the Collection

- 7.2 The Council's Museum Service possesses a fine collection of historical objects, information and artworks. These are displayed within the Museum of Hartlepool, the Hartlepool Art Gallery and selected buildings such as the Civic Centre and Borough Buildings, either as part of the permanent historical displays or as changing exhibitions. When not on display these are held in storage. The collections are used as valuable reference collections for researching the history and cultural identity of the town.

7.3 The first museum in Hartlepool was the West Hartlepool Athenaeum, however, it is not known whether any artefacts or collections still remain today. The founding collections were donated from a number of sources including local residents, industrialists, benefactors, and building covenanted. The modern collections date from the opening of the Gray Art Gallery and Museum in 1920, which was donated as a gift to the town by the founder, Sir William Creswell Gray in recognition and thanksgiving for the safe return of his son from the First World War. Major improvements to the Service were undertaken in the mid 1990's as part of the City Challenge and the Teesside Development Corporation investment into Hartlepool. Hartlepool Museums have been recognised as a major regional service, achieving Renaissance funding in 2003 to provide sub regional activity. This was achieved due to the merit and the high visitor attendances achieved by the service.

7.4 Members were shown a timeline of items which have been collected over more recent years:-

1960s

Additions to the Contemporary Art Collection: Hartlepool has an impressive and important collection of over 1,000 pieces of fine art. The collection is mainly Victorian and Edwardian in period, largely as a result of the founding collection by Sir William Gray. With few exceptions, most subsequent collecting has been works of artists living or working at least part of their lives in the Hartlepool area. The works are by the internationally renowned, as well as locally working amateur artists. The most notable artists include Daniel Maclise, Lucian Freud and Frank Auerbach, Stanhope Alexander Forbes, and John Wilson Carmichael. There are also a number of works by locally born artists such as Frederic Shields, James Clark and Frank Henry Mason.

1970s

Maritime Collections (Maritime Museum 1971) and industry: The Maritime Collection is made up of ship models, photographs, company records, ephemera and some equipment.

1980s

Social history, ephemera, ships' plans, archaeology, Wingfield Castle: The collection contains around 35,000 plans for the building of around 300 ships built by Hartlepool including the Wingfield Castle. Almost all the plans relate to ships built by Grays shipyard from 1927 to the yards closure in 1961. When the shipyard closed, the plans were still of importance and often bought by other ship builders. In the mid 1980's many of the plans were returned to Hartlepool and now feature in the collection. A hugely informative collection is that preserved by Robert Wood, a local historian, which contains over 40,000 examples of 19th century and early 20th century ephemera, manuscript material and posters from the Hartlepool printing firm owned by John Procter. The collection reflects the social aspects of life as well as the industry in the town.

1990s

Active collecting for new displays in Museum of Hartlepool

2000s

Expansion of education, outreach, learning exhibitions and publications

Value of the Collection

- 7.5 Members were informed that new Audit Commission asset valuation guidance for Local Government is recommending as good practice that a re-valuation be carried out every 5 years, as opposed to the previous practice of a ten year re-valuation.
- 7.6 The current insurance valuation of the collections is £13,408,832. This valuation is not necessarily the worth or sale price but is based on either new replacement value; second hand replacement value; facsimile value; or compensation value. This valuation was completed in February 2012 and at the request of the Working Group, includes the Civic Ceremonial Silver and Civic Regalia (Civic Collection). Members requested that the items from the Civic Collection which are of historical or social economic value be accepted into the Museum collection and cared for in the correct way, (as some items had been damaged by flooding while in storage). Members suggested that these items are exhibited, where appropriate, in the secure environment provided by the Museum.
- 7.7 Members were aware that the Council hold a number of items in storage for others at a cost to the Council. Therefore, Members requested that the owners be contacted and asked to claim their items. If not claimed, then the Council take ownership of them, with the items of historical / social economic value being added into the Museum collection and other items disposed of ethically.
- 7.8 Members questioned the values of a number of public art works, mainly sculpture and streetscape features, which are not in the Museum collection, for example, the red head sculpture 'The Watcher' and whether these were insured. It was clarified that these items are not required to be individually valued but are included within the broader Council property asset base and placed on the asset register for statutory accounting purposes.

Storage and Maintenance of Collection

- 7.9 Members were informed that the collection is maintained by one full time Curatorial Officer / Collections Officer. In relation to the storage of the collections, there is one secure, heavy load, air conditioned store, one secure art store and one secure general store, all within Council property. The percentage of collections in storage varies depending on changes to exhibitions and temporary exhibitions but Members noted that the percentage of collections on display is the highest in service history.

- 7.10 The Working Group queried whether the Council could charge to loan its items to other exhibitions. Members were informed that the Council does not currently charge for loaned items. However, the loan is at no cost to the Council, as the cost for insurance; transportation; conservation of the item while it is on loan; and restoration of the item (if required) is covered by the person borrowing the item.
- 7.11 Members supported the exploration of ways to further improve access to the collection by using the improved storage area for the archaeological material.

8. THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE COLLECTIONS, THEIR USE, EDUCATIONAL IMPACT, DISTRIBUTION/LOCATION AND THE PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES FOR ACCESSIONING/ARCHIVING ARTEFACTS

- 8.1 Members were very interested to view the collections to see how they are stored, used and displayed. Therefore, Members visited the Museum of Hartlepool and Sir William Gray House.

Site Visit to the Museum of Hartlepool and Sir William Gray House

- 8.2 Members indicated that they found the visit very interesting and informative and it highlighted a number of different working practices and arrangements. Members viewed a number of permanent and temporary exhibitions which covered different topics and eras. The home front of World War was a very popular exhibition and Members supported the option of displaying this exhibition on a permanent basis in the future.
- 8.3 It was noted by Members that there were gaps in historical content of some of the exhibitions displayed within the Museum. Members emphasised the importance of telling the whole story of Hartlepool and it was essential to try and collect all items that are missing from the collection. The importance of collecting items within families from elder generations was highlighted by Members; examples included minesweeping artefacts and memorabilia in relation to the fishing industry in the Second World War. It was suggested that contacting local regimental organisations may prove beneficial in identifying items of local interest in relation to war service experiences.
- 8.4 The Working Group suggested promoting the opportunity for the public to donate items to the collection through a regular article in the Council's magazine, Hartbeat, specifying examples of the types of artefacts required and sample photographs.
- 8.5 Members were of the opinion that engaging with the public is very important and a social history trawl would prove useful to find artefacts that are missing from the collection.

Current Use of the Collections

- 8.6 Members were informed about the different ways in which the collections are used today, as illustrated below:-
- (a) Educational purposes. Over 14,000 school children visited the museums last year with up to 70% from local schools. In addition to this a significant amount of work is undertaken within schools and items from the collection are loaned to schools;
 - (b) Outreach (for example, handling sessions, use of collections as inspiration, reminiscence);
 - (c) Displays in public buildings (for example, the Civic Centre);
 - (d) Loans to other institutions (for example, the Lucian Freud is currently on display in the National Portrait Gallery in London);
 - (e) Exhibitions (permanent and temporary);
 - (f) Events (for example, the Wingfield Castle is to be used within the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Festival);
 - (g) Scholarship and research; and
 - (h) Preservation and conservation of cultural property
- 8.7 Members welcomed the expansion and development of the Museum exhibitions (by seeking external funding) to redisplay, further improve interpretation and increase the numbers on display, with a target opening for 2020, which is the Museum Service's 100th anniversary. Members also agreed that 'designation' should be sought for the Maritime Collections. Designation is a special award that is considered of great importance to the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council; it recognises collections deemed to be of national and international importance based on their quality and significance.

Accessioning and Archiving

- 8.8 Members were pleased to hear that the Museum Service has Accredited Status, awarded by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, which is the highest achievable quality standard. All Museum Services aspire to this standard as it is important to secure partnership support and funding towards the ongoing development and management of the service. The Museum Service works to the Museum Association Code of Practice and Code of Ethics.
- 8.9 The Working Group was informed that all the collections are accessioned and audited and some of the accessions include multiple items, for example, the Robert Wood Collection, which contains 55,000 separate items. The

accessions register dates back to the 1920's, and over the years has developed from a hand written ledger to computerised records. The register contains all the information that is known about the item, for example, whether the item was purchased outright, on loan to the Council, or purchased with grant aid. Members acknowledged that if items were purchased with grant aid and then disposed of, the grant aid would have to be paid back.

- 8.10 All accredited museums are required to have a formally adopted Collections, Acquisitions and Disposals Policy. Hartlepool Museum Service has this policy and it is due for renewal in the 2012/13 Municipal Year. The policy is the guiding document which gives approval to the range of relevant material which the service will focus upon for its collecting policies. Members of the Working group expressed an interest in being involved in the review and development of this Policy.

9. THE POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF DISPOSING OF ITEMS WITHIN THE MUSEUM COLLECTION

- 9.1 In relation to disposal, items which have no particular connection or relevance to the town or areas where duplication exists are disposed of ethically and the standard ethical process is to offer these items to other museum services. If items are considered for sale, there are strict guidelines which need to be followed. To avoid conflict with the Accredited Museum Status such sales are very closely monitored and should only be for the benefit of the collection itself, either through reinvestment in the acquisition of appropriate items or in certain circumstances the investment in the wellbeing of the remaining collection, for example, improving storage facilities.

- 9.2 The sale of works for non museum purposes is unethical and will result in the loss of Accredited Museum Status, which can result in pariah reputation, loss of opportunities for grants and clawback. Also, the Heritage Lottery Fund are mindful of the Council not following ethical procedures on collections which could mean that not only would the Museum Service be unable to bid for grants in future, but the Council itself could be debarred and therefore would be unable to apply for funding.

- 9.3 Members did seek assurance that if the Council was to enter into a Trust arrangement with another Local Authority, then the ownership of the collection would not be jeopardised and would still remain the property of Hartlepool Borough Council.

10. OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE COLLECTION, TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION THE LEGAL STATUS, ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CHALLENGING BUDGET SITUATION THAT THE AUTHORITY FACES

- 10.1 Members were very keen to examine innovative ways to generate income by using the Collection and were pleased to see the use of an ipad, Flickr, the Council's website, the Public Art Catalogue website and various published literature for displaying and promoting the collection.

- 10.2 Since the introduction of Flickr in April 2011, 36,000 people have viewed the collections. Members acknowledged that only key items are displayed online and in order to provide an online catalogue of every item within the Museum collection, it would, as an estimate, take four to five years with three to four staff. In order to fund a project of this size, external funding would be required. Members emphasised the need to raise awareness about Flickr through publishing its use as widely as possible.
- 10.3 Members questioned whether photographs of artefacts could be printed off from the website at a cost, or literature, postcards, gifts could be ordered online resulting in a means of income generation for the Council. This was currently an area that the service was exploring. Members felt that if this was to be progressed that the delivery should be in-house.
- 10.4 The Museum Service offers a range of souvenirs for sale, for example, postcards and pictures of artefacts. Members were very keen to make better commercial use of the collection whilst ensuring that fees and charges are realistic.

11. CONCLUSIONS

- 11.1 The Museum and Art Gallery Collection Working group concluded:-
- (a) That if items of the Museum collection are considered for sale or disposal, then strict guidelines need to be followed in order to maintain the Accredited Museum Status and it was recognised that sales should only be for the benefit of the collection itself and disposal should always be carried out in an ethical way;
 - (b) That the items of historic and / or social economic value from the Civic Collection form part of the Museum collection and ethical disposal of non-collecting items is arranged;
 - (c) That the owners of the items which are held in storage are contacted and asked to claim their items. If not claimed, then the Council take ownership of them and the items of historical and / or social economic value are added into the Museum collection and ethical disposal of non-collecting items is arranged;
 - (d) That awareness needs to be raised on how to access the collection, for example, viewing paintings through Flickr, the Public Catalogue Foundation and BBC online in order to maximise the effectiveness of the collection and increase its usage;
 - (e) That making better commercial use of the collection is essential in order to increase income generation, for example, the delivery of an in-house online ordering and printing service;

- (f) That it is extremely important to collect all artefacts that are connected with the history of Hartlepool and therefore promoting the opportunity for the public to donate items is essential;
- (g) That expansion and development of the Museum exhibitions for the Museum Service's 100th anniversary is welcomed along with seeking 'designation' for the Maritime Collections; and
- (h) That a review of the Collections, Acquisitions and Disposals Policy is important and that Members of the Working Group are involved in this review.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 The Museum and Art Gallery Collection Working Group has taken evidence from a range of sources to assist in the formulation of a balanced range of recommendations. The Forum's key recommendations to the Cabinet are as outlined below:-

- (a) That Members of the Museum and Art Gallery Working Group are involved in the review and development of the Collections, Acquisitions and Disposals Policy in the 2012/13 Municipal Year, and that this includes a progress update:-
 - (i) on the expansion and development of the Museum exhibitions; and
 - (ii) on seeking 'designation' for the Council's Maritime Collections.
- (b) That the Council promotes the opportunity for the public to donate items to the Collection through a regular article in the Council's magazine, Hartbeat, specifying examples of the types of artefacts required and sample photographs
- (c) That the Council explores how the collection can:-
 - (i) be promoted to further enhance its usage; and
 - (ii) be utilised to increase income generation opportunities
- (d) That the potential of displaying more of the Council's regalia be explored and that in doing this, work undertaken a number of years ago be re-visited, with a view of erecting a display in the Long Gallery of the Civic Suite.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Working Group is grateful to all those who have presented evidence during the course of our investigation. We would like to place on record our appreciation, in particular of the willingness and co-operation we have received from the below named:-

Hartlepool Borough Council:

John Mennear – Assistant Director of Child and Adult Services

Mark Simmons – Museums and Gallery Manager

David Worthington – Head of Culture and Information

Kate Downey – Collections Access Assistant

Jean-Philippe Stienne – Collections Access Officer

COUNCILLOR MARJORIE JAMES CHAIR OF THE MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY COLLECTION WORKING GROUP

June 2012

Contact Officer: Laura Stones – Scrutiny Support Officer
Chief Executive's Department – Corporate Strategy
Hartlepool Borough Council
Tel:- 01429 523087
Email:- laura.stones@hartlepool.gov.uk

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were consulted or referred to in the preparation of this report:-

- (i) Report of the Scrutiny Manager entitled 'Scrutiny Investigation into the Borough Council Museum and Art Gallery Collection – Scoping Report' presented to the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee of 2 September 2011
- (ii) Presentation of the Assistant Director of Community Services entitled 'Museum and Art Gallery Assets Review' delivered to the Museum and Art Gallery Collection Working group of 23 September 2011
- (iii) Presentation of the Assistant Director of Community Services entitled 'The Potential Options for the Future of the Collection' delivered to the Museum and Art Gallery Collection Working group of 17 October 2011

- (iv) Report of the Assistant Director of Community Services entitled 'Collection Valuations' delivered to the Museum and Art Gallery Collection Working group of 16 March 2012