



Report to: Joint Museums Committee, 16th September 2022

Report of: Senior Curator

Subject: COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

1. Recommendation

That the Joint Committee:

- 1.1 Note the progress and forward aims on work to develop the two authorities' museum collections;**
- 1.2 Approve the de-restriction of the emergency Covid Project Reserves; and**
- 1.3 Allocate £9000 from general reserves to support the return of long-term loans and the continuity of community-focussed collections work.**

2. Background

COMMUNITY COLLECTIONS

- 2.1 Community-focussed collections work has largely been concentrated in externally funded research and outreach projects over recent years. These include:
 - The Esmee Fairbairn Foundation-funded *Glove Affair* project has utilised the City's glove collection to work with groups and volunteers focussed on loneliness and isolation, with looked after children, and with Afghan and, more recently, Ukrainian refugees. A Glove Workshop, built at the collections store as a legacy of the project, will offer a focus for community groups to engage with glove making beyond the project.
 - The John Ellerman Foundation-funded *Vardo* project seeks to engage and consult with the Gypsy Roma & Traveller communities to develop the contextual archive supporting County's collection.
 - Central Government Cultural Recovery funding has funded research into the City's world cultures collection, engagement with the Worcester Mela, and research and display of collections that resonate with the LGBT community.
 - The Art Fund funded *Canaletto: A Venetian's View* and *Hokusai's Great Wave: Reflections of Japan* exhibition projects have encouraged the development of relationships with, and resources for, blind and partially sighted people and neurodiverse groups within our communities.

LONG-TERM LOANS

- 2.2 Historically, UK museums accepted some objects on long-term or permanent loan as well as fully acquiring objects for the collections. This has effectively meant that previously our museum services have invested time and resources into storing and caring for objects that were not owned by the local authorities.

This practice came to an end at the end of the twentieth century and Museums Worcestershire have already returned a number of loans that were not on display.

- 2.3 A review in 2020, funded by Arts Council Cultural Recovery funding, highlighted further objects including large objects in the transport and social history collections that could be returned to their owners or their descendants.

3. Information

COMMUNITY COLLECTIONS

- 3.1 A planned application to Arts Council England will fund an eighteen-month long project to build on the expertise, methodology and relationships developed in the outreach projects noted above, translating outreach work into improved museum displays. It will backfund a member of the collections team to dedicate time to this project.
- 3.2 The project aims to work with community groups to establish diverse community stories and identify objects that are missing from collections, research, interpretation and displays. Stories and objects developed with community groups would be included into new displays. Methodologies will also be developed to help plan towards future display and exhibitions.
- 3.3 The project further plans to identify, through consultation, how collection development policies can be more representative of the city and county's diverse communities. The city and county policies will be reviewed to ensure gaps in the collection are identified and planned for, aiming for representation of the wider community in future collecting.

LONG-TERM LOANS

- 3.4 Returning long-term loans before the lease end at the Museum's Collections Store in 2025 will help prioritise and create space for the long-term planning for the care of permanent collections, provide better public access and community and volunteering work.
- 3.5 The return of long-term loans can be challenging due to the difficult nature of tracing descendants of original lenders. The size of some of the objects means that return transport and available space with lenders' families can be difficult. The descendants of lenders often need to find new owners for objects they do not wish to store themselves. To make progress with lenders, this work needs dedicated capacity.

COVID EMERGENCY FUNDS PROJECT RESERVE

- 3.6 Museums Worcestershire was successful in receiving specific Covid emergency funding from Historic England, Arts Council England and the Department of Culture Media & Sport's Covid Emergency Response Funds. These projects funded the support of Worcestershire's artists and heritage organisations and helped Museums Worcestershire to pilot new developments during lockdown periods.
- 3.7 These projects utilised the specialisms and dedicated time of Museums Worcestershire staff. The funders agreed that their funding towards core salary time and overheads could be moved to museum reserves at their project year ends.

These projects are now complete with all funding confirmed, but still holding reserves of £14444 (No One Left Behind), £100 (Culture Recovery 1) and £442 (Culture Recovery 3). These reserves are no longer required to be ring-fenced to these projects and the funders do not require any additional reporting on their use.

4. Preferred Option

- 4.1 It is proposed that the reserve funds noted above, totalling £14,986 be de-restricted from project reserves to general museum reserves.
- 4.2 It is proposed that £9000 be allocated from general reserves to:
- fund a fixed-term post 1 day per week for 12 months to work on returning long-term loans, and
 - provide a budget for return transport for larger loans.

5. Alternative Options Considered

- 5.1 Continue to store and care for long-term loans and move with permanent collections to new stores after lease end if necessary.

6. Implications

6.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications

While this work will help the collections develop, improve and become more efficient, these post cannot be funded from main budgets. The proposals outlined enable progress without a loss of service.

6.2 Legal and Governance Implications

Museums Worcestershire will work with sector-standard documentation, The Collections Trust and both authority's legal teams, where required, to ensure loans are returned correctly

6.3 Risk Implications

There is a risk that improvements will stall if this work cannot progress.

6.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

The collections policies of the two authorities will be updated through this work and brought to this committee for review next year.

6.5 Equality Implications

Equality impact assessments will be undertaken on specific projects or loans returns if needed.

6.6 Human Resources Implications

Recruitment to a fixed-term contract will be undertaken with advice from Worcester City Council Human Resources

6.7 Health and Safety Implications

Appropriate risk assessments will be completed, with advice from both authority's advisers as required

6.8 Social, Environmental and Economic Implications

The development of collections and the collections store will improve access, representation and opportunity for public engagement, adding to social impact

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Background Papers: None