Appendix E
DOCUMENTATION POLICY

1   INTRODUCTION

Items entering Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums (AAGM) must be documented so that the museum knows exactly what is in its collections and where each item is located. Accurate recording allows for greater accessibility to the collections and saves time in the planning of exhibitions, research, publications and answering enquiries. The object itself will provide much of the information: what it is made of, who made it and for what purpose. The curator also records the provenance and any additional knowledge gained through research or from external sources. The purpose of accurate cataloguing is to allow the collections to be easily searched and for retrieval of specific information.

2   BACKGROUND TO DOCUMENTATION OF THE COLLECTIONS

The collections are divided into two curatorial sections: Art and History, which are catalogued using the MDA's prefix ABDMS and a running number sequence. Prior to mid-2018, the Art and History collections were catalogued using ABDAG and ABDMS numbers respectively. Items on loan are given the prefix X along with a loan number, prefix L.

In the 1980s a computer mainframe system (GALS) was developed by the Council's IT Department and paper records were transferred to this database. In March 2002 the data from GALS was moved to The Museum System (TMS). The Collections are divided into 9 Departments on TMS: Applied Art, Archaeology, Fine Art, Numismatics, Science and Industry, Social History, Maritime History, Ships and City Monuments and further sub-divided into Classifications, which are detailed in the Acquisition and Disposal Policy. TMS has an Internet front-end, e-museum, which also provides public internet access as www.aagm.co.uk to selected items from the collections.

In addition to the Museums and Galleries collections the service holds approximately 12,000 publications in the James McBey Art Reference Library and Lloyds Register of Shipping Library. These items will be catalogued on the shared city library database Spydus to allow access to the holdings through the Library's online service.

3   AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Link to the Service Plan

The Museums and Galleries **Documentation Policy** relates specifically to Aberdeen city Council Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) in the following areas:

Outcome: We will implement the council's Being Digital Strategy to support citizens, businesses and visitors connect easily from their homes or other locations.

Change Activity:

Enhancement of the accessibility of cultural participation and learning platforms within the Directorate

> We strive to provide greater digital access to collections through adding to and improving the online catalogue records, undertaking documentation projects with partners, using gallery screens and social media to highlight items and encourage exploration, and using new technology.

Outcome: We will work with partners and the community to develop iconic tourism attractions to capitalise on non-business tourism and leisure markets and stimulate diverse cultural offerings.

Change Activity:

Increase opportunities for creating and participating in high quality cultural experiences by further development of the culture programme and the cultural infrastructure required to deliver it.

And

Outcome: Engage partners to expand and improve provision of post school learning and employment opportunities for young people.

Change Activity:

Improve pathways to cultural learning and volunteering to increase participation in accredited volunteer programmes.

> We will continue to recruit volunteers for documentation-related projects in order to develop our tourist attractions. A range of activities are undertaken by volunteers, such as transcribing historic text, arranging and cataloguing archives, adding images to TMS, keywording, blogging, packing and unpacking with attention to location control, and creating small displays.

Outcome: We will deliver a £30M refurbishment of Aberdeen Art Gallery

Change Activity:

Modernise and improve Art Gallery, Cowdray Hall and memorial Court, increasing exhibition space, creating a world class visitor experience resulting in greater number of visitors reporting positive experiences.

> We will use digital technology within Aberdeen Art Gallery and the Hall of Remembrance to highlight the collections and encourage engagement. Interactive tablets, large screens, E-ink displays and projections will use our catalogued records and photographs and help increase awareness of the Recognised Collections of National Significance.

The aims of AAGM's Documentation Policy are that for each object in the collection:

- AAGM has documentary proof of legal title and has established that the previous owner acquired the item legally.

- Each object is identified by a unique number.

- The number is labelled or marked on the object.

- There is an accurate record in the TMS database identified by the object accession number.

- The database record contains cross-references to any paper-based documentation associate with the object.

- AAGM has an exact and up-to-date record of location.

- All documentation procedures meet SPECTRUM standards: http://collectionstrust.org.uk/spectrum/

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Our objectives are to instil and maintain professional standards in documentation. We will use Benchmarks in Collections Care to improve our standards.

4   COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT

- Documentation procedures are detailed in the Collections Management Manual which is available for consultation by all staff.

- The short-form *Procedure for Cataloguing* ensures that all curators enter records consistently.

- New acquisitions are input to the database within 10 days of their receipt by AAGM.

- In the case of a large number of acquisitions it is acceptable to catalogue only in the mandatory fields, adding further information at a later date.

- Copies of Entry Forms and Transfer of Title forms are filed and held in a secure location by the Collections Access section.

- Recent projects have been undertaken to eradicate the documentation backlog with a primary aim of creating an inventory of all objects which can then be assessed for possible disposals.

- All disposal procedure follows Museums Association guidelines.

5   SECURITY

- Changes in location are notified in writing to either the Documentation Officer or the Collections Access Officer, who update the computer record.

- The hard-copy Object Movement Forms are filed and retained for a period of two years.

- The Museum's displays are checked regularly throughout the day by the Museum Assistants. If there are any problems these are immediately raised to the Museum Supervisor on duty for appropriate action.

- The Lead Curator (Collections Access) and the Head of Collections undertake regular Inventory Checks which are described in the Collections Management Manual.

- The TMS database is backed up regularly by Aberdeen City Council's IT department.

- Old paper records are kept in the Aberdeen Treasure Hub Archive Room and consulted when required.

- All personal paper-based data is secured in a locked cupboard in compliance with the Data Protection Act (1998).

- The TMS database is accessible only by password. Volunteers are given access to a limited number of fields.

6   ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION MATERIAL

It is not necessary or practical to document in detail all the bulk archaeological excavation material, mainly from highly productive excavations within the medieval burgh of Aberdeen. Some objects, mostly those of greater significance or fragility, are documented as individual objects, while larger groups, particularly of animal bone, pottery and soil samples are documented at box level or equivalent.

7   RETROSPECTIVE DOCUMENTATION

AAGM's primary accession register is the TMS computer database catalogue. The backlog consists of objects which do not have a record on the computer catalogue. The aim of retrospective documentation is to ensure that each individual object in the museum's collection has an inventory record on The Museum System (TMS) collection database. The Documentation Plan quantifies and addresses the backlog.

8   RESOURCES AND BUDGETS

External funding has been and will continue to be sought in order to employ additional staff to address the documentation backlog.