Valence House Museum Documentation Policy Statement

Name of museum: Valence House Museum

Name of governing body: London Borough of Barking and Dagenham Council

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body: 23 June 2015

Policy review procedure:

The Documentation policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years.

Date at which this policy is due for review: 23 June 2020
1.0 Introduction

1.1 Documentation is a core function of collections management, and it is inextricably linked with a vast array of other core activities. The information held by Valence House Museum about its collections is at least as valuable as the collections themselves and documentation and information retrieval consequently takes a high priority.

1.2 Our policy for documentation of the collections is to ensure that the information we hold relating to the collections is accurate, secure, reliable and accessible.

2.0 Aims and Objectives

2.1 The aim of this Policy is to ensure that Valence House Museum fulfills its guardianship, stewardship and access responsibilities. Through the implementation of this policy, the Museum’s objective is to:

- Improve accountability for the collections;
- maintain at least minimum professional standards in documentation procedures and collection information and attain the very highest standards wherever possible;
- Extend access to collection information;
- Strengthen the security of the collections.

3.0 Accountability

3.1 Valence House Museum makes a commitment to maintain at least the minimum level of collections documentation requires by SPECTRUM that will allow it to identify and locate all items for which it is legally responsible, including loans.

3.2 The Curator has full responsibility for documentation.

4.0 Levels of Documentation

4.1 For the majority of the collections, curatorial staff will document to individual item level. However, for certain collections, for example bulk archaeological excavation material, it is neither feasible nor practical to document the material in this detail, and items will be documented at group level. It is the aim of Valence House Museum to have a basic ‘inventory’ record for all identified items and groups within the collection; whilst some items will be documented to a more detailed ‘catalogue’ level.

4.2 Valence House Museum will document its collections to either Inventory or Catalogue level, as described below:

- Inventory level: This includes sufficient key information to allow any object(s) in our care to be individually identified and verified. All accessioned items, loans inward and outward, and any other unaccessioned objects as appropriate are documented at this level.
- Catalogue level: We will identify the collections/objects that merit further, more detailed, documentation, thus raising the standard of information to catalogue
level. Such documentation will include the known history of an artefact, and references to any relevant publication etc.

4.3 Museum staff will document and identify collections in line with the respective professional standards:
- Museum: SPECTRUM 4.0: the UK Museum Collections Management Standard
- PAS197: 2009 Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management

4.4 The Museum will meet the minimum standards for the SPECTRUM primary procedures:
- Object Entry
- Acquisition
- Loan in
- Loan out
- Location and movement control
- Cataloguing
- Object exit

4.5 Catalogue entries will be indexed using the National Council on Archives Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names and the UNESCO thesaurus as a base.

5.0 Computerisation of Records

5.1 Heritage Services, of which Valence House Museum is part, uses a standard-compliant information management software for all of its collections and information:
- Museum: AdLib Museum Plus
- Archives: AdLib Archive
- Library: AdLib Library
- This software allows collection information to be shared across the three services and enables searches to be carried out across the three databases.

5.2 For the purposes of thesaurus control across the three databases, Valence House Museum will catalogue collections in line with the respective professional standards:
- Archives: International Standard for Archival Description (general) ISAD(G)

5.3 Valence House Museum maintains an electronic storage location guide for its collections enabling easy retrieval of its collection. This is backed up regularly on the Council’s civic server.

5.4 In order to ensure that the current electronic system does not become obsolete, the Museum will remain informed of technological advances and ensure the long term accessibility of the information held.

6.0 Ethics and legislation

6.1 Valence House Museum will comply with the following ethical guidelines or legislation in all aspects of its museum work:
- Museum Association Code of Ethics
6.2 All requests for information will be considered in terms of compliance with these legislations and we will review requests for confidential data such as donor information, environmental information, valuations or site details on a case by case basis, and in accordance with the applicable legislation and any legal agreements or conditions of gift.

7.0 Access to collections information

7.1 Valence House Museum is committed to ensuring that its documentation allows for access to information for as many users as possible, such as:
- Staff
- Researchers
- Members of the public

7.2 Objects will always be documented with a view to making the information accessible to the public. There will be an increased emphasis on digitisation ensuring objects are photographed or scanned to a high standard. Heritage Services will seek to publish collections online and to use collections information to enhance its exhibitions and community engagement programme. The standards applied to cataloguing and digitisation will ensure that the Museum collections information can be integrated into partnership projects using shared digital platforms.

8.0 Security against loss of irreplaceable collection information

8.1 Valence House Museum has in place measures to ensure the physical security and long-term preservation of all documentation records, whether paper or computerised. Valence House Museum will update all manual and computerised records as appropriate. Daily backups will be made to the Council’s central server to secure all digital data. Where collection information is wholly computerised and managed centrally Valence House Museum will make backup copies of all key files, and where considered appropriate, house them securely off-site.

9.0 Retrospective documentation backlog

9.1 Valence House Museum is committed to reducing its documentation backlogs. It will continue to work to resolve discrepancies between inventory records and existing documentation. The backlog will continue to be addressed in a systematic manner, in accordance with the levels of staffing and resources available at the time. This will be reflected in the current Documentation Plan.