Valence House Museum
Access Policy

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 collections development 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 2015

This document sets out the Policy of Valence House Museum on its physical and intellectual access provision for all visitors and staff.
1.0 Introduction

1.1 Statement of Purpose:
Valence House Museum exists to inspire learning and pride by collecting, preserving and engaging people with the heritage of Barking and Dagenham.

1.2 This policy operates alongside, and should be read in conjunction with the following policies:
   • Care and Conservation Policy
   • Collection Development Policy
   • Documentation Policy

1.3 The guidelines outlined in this policy are informed by and work in conjunction with the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham Council's Single Equality Scheme 2013-2016.

1.4 In line with the Museum Accreditation Scheme, this policy details how the Valence House Museum will:
   • improve accountability for collections and collections information.
   • maintain at least minimum professional standards in documentation, collections information and access to collections.
   • extend access to collections and collections information including facilitating physical, sensory and intellectual access on site and virtually, and by lending and borrowing.
   • strengthen the security of the collections through accurate collections information.

2.0 Ethics and legislation

2.1 Valence House Museum recognises its responsibility to adhere to the Equality Act 2010 within the reasonable constraints of resources, conservation and security.

3.0 Access Assessments and user needs

3.1 As part of the Museum redevelopment that took place between 2007 and 2010 an access audit was carried out in 2010. This audit will be subject to review in 2016.

3.2 Valence House Museum understands that users have different needs and is committed to reducing barriers to both physical and intellectual access to its collections.

3.3 Valence House is committed to assessing and identifying access issues via evaluation and previous requests, and through user feedback via comment books and in-person comments.

3.4 Valence House Museum is committed to addressing access issues by means of internal checklists, access audits, or working with local advocacy groups.

3.5 Valence House Museum aims to use evaluation as a means to define its target audiences, and to develop the interpretation of its broad range of exhibitions and displays to reflect the varied cultures and artistic practices within the borough.
3.6 Valence House Museum is committed to offering the widest and most appropriate forms of access to its collections, expertise, facilities and services for the purposes of education, research and enjoyment by all within the reasonable constraints of resources, conservation and security.

3.7 Valence House Museum champions free access to its collections information through its displays, exhibitions, learning programme, website, loans and events, in order to inspire learning and pride.

3.8 Valence House Museum will manage the competing demands of access and long term collection care in accordance with its Collections Care and Conservation Policy.

3.9 Valence House Museum involves all staff members in implementing its Access Policy.

4.0 Access to collections

4.1 The Museum collections at Valence House include both physical and digital collection items. Information about these items and their associated intellectual property is essential in enabling access to the collections.

4.2 Valence House Museum is committed to creating and maintaining quality and up-to-date information about its collection items, and ensuring this conforms to appropriate national and international standards wherever possible.

4.3 Valence House Museum will be accountable for and will enable access to all items for which the Museum is legally responsible: collection items, loans items, items on deposit, un-accessioned and previously undocumented items. Documentation must be available for inspection by auditors.

4.4 Valence House Museum is committed to ensuring that the AdLib Information System is the primary tool for creating and managing collections information and items for which the Museum is legally responsible.

4.5 To ensure that items can be located and referenced across the three collections (Museum, Archive and Library), all catalogue entries will be indexed using the National Council on Archives Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names, UKAT and the UNESCO thesaurus as a base.

4.6 All staff responsible for recording collections documentation will receive training in all relevant data standards and on the use of AdLib Information Systems, to enable the accurate input and retrieval of collections information. All data shall be traceable through an audit trail as to who created or edited it.

4.7 Valence House Museum is committed to regular reviews of the AdLib Information System to ensure it is fit for purpose and that collection information is appropriately safeguarded against potential future obsolescence of the systems.
4.8 The Museum Curator is responsible for carrying out Spot Checks and Audits to verify the physical presence of Museum collection items in locations as recorded on the AdLib Information system.

4.9 Collection items not on display can be viewed by making an appointment with the Curator, subject to resources and the condition of the collection item. Most items can be viewed in the Local Studies Library reading room.

4.10 Appropriate levels of access are monitored and approved by the Curator, who has the right to refuse or terminate access at their discretion in order to protect collections.

4.11 Facilities may be provided for close inspection of collection items, providing it is justified and the item is not placed at risk.

4.12 Some documents are closed to the public on account of their content. Valence House Museum is aware of its responsibilities under the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts and is working towards agreed closure periods for specified series of records; these will be published when available.

5.0 Access to displays

5.1 Valence House Museum will ensure that information about items on display in its permanent displays and temporary exhibitions is provided through labels, wall text and other contextual and complementary information.

5.2 Valence House Museum will follow the guidelines set out in the Equalities Act: 2010 when designing exhibitions and preparing text.

5.3 Where access to the displays is restricted due to the nature of the historic building, Valence House Museum will seek to provide information about the items and themes within the inaccessible galleries via multimedia programmes.

5.4 Valence House Museum seeks to reproduce all gallery and exhibition text in large format within the reasonable constraints of resources, conservation and security.

5.5 Valence House Museum seeks to create a programme of BSL and first-language tours to reduce barriers to both physical and intellectual access to its displays.

5.6 Valence House Museum will make tactile objects available for handling by vision impaired visitors during special events. This will be undertaken in line with the Care and Conservation policy.

6.0 Access to information

6.1 Valence House Museum recognises that online information is often the first line of enquiry for its visitors. Valence House Museum will ensure that all online information is updated regularly.
6.2 Valence House Museum will make information on its collections, buildings, events, activities and the history of the borough available online through its website and social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter and Flickr.

6.3 Information sheets providing instructions on how to access the resources at Valence House and relating to various aspects of local history will be produced and uploaded regularly to the website by the Archive and Local Studies Library.

6.4 Valence House Museum is committed to providing an up-to-date online catalogue through which users can access information on the collection items held by the Museum.

6.5 It is the aim of Valence House Museum to facilitate the reproduction of material held within its collections wherever possible. Where it is necessary, researchers must clear copyright for themselves although staff will, wherever possible, provide advice about whom to contact for this permission.

6.6 The Museum will answer enquiries regarding its collections and services in order to supplement information provided elsewhere. However, it not possible for staff to carry out protracted research on behalf of enquirers.

6.7 All enquiries will be processed in accordance with the Council’s Customer Service Framework, and in line with the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts.

6.8 It is the policy of Valence House Museum to make no charge to individuals working on private, non-commercial study for our enquiry service; however, Valence House Museum reserves the right to charge commercial enquirers.

6.9 The Museum provides a free service, subject to resources, whereby specialist staff provide an opinion on items for which they have relevant experience.