

Reading Museum & Town Hall Access Policy Statement

Date created: September 2012

Review date: September 2017

Mission statement

Reading Museum & Town Hall ('the Museum') aims to be a leading cultural hub for Reading and the Thames Valley by:

- Maintaining and growing its nationally and internationally admired collections
- Optimising community engagement with its facilities and services
- Building on its reputation for creative outreach and learning
- Operating innovatively and cost-effectively for a sustainable future

Our commitment to access

This Policy supports our mission statement by providing a framework that strives to include all our visitors, potential visitors, volunteers and staff. We will make our collections and buildings accessible, by removing as many physical, intellectual or cultural barriers to access as practicable, within the limits of budgetary, legal and planning considerations.

We are committed to developing a programme of activities and events that are designed to involve, educate and engage groups from a wide range of backgrounds and all sectors of Reading's community.

Areas of access covered in this policy include:

- Physical access: we aim to maintain buildings and facilities that are as physically accessible as possible.
- Intellectual access: we aim to provide information in a range of formats appropriate to the needs of a wide range of visitors.
- Emotional access: we aim to provide a good standard of customer care to ensure that all visitors feel welcome and comfortable in our venues.
- Financial access: we aim to keep charges as competitive as possible to ensure that as many people as possible are able to access our services.

Reading Borough Council policy background

This policy has been written in line with Reading Borough Council (RBC) equality policy. RBC has a public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010. The Act brought together existing equality laws and made them stronger. It also strengthened existing duties and places new duties on public bodies.

RBC Equality Statement

Diversity - Equality - Inclusion - Cohesion

'Reading Borough Council wants Reading to be a place where all people thrive - physically, mentally, socially, spiritually and economically. We will do everything within our powers and resources to make this happen.'

Access assessment and action plan

Access Audits have been regularly undertaken since the full refurbishment of the Museum in 1999-2000. In 2012 selected staff received training from the Centre for Accessible Environments to undertake in-house audits that have informed this policy. An access action plan has been prepared that sets out the work required to improve access by removing barriers identified by the audit and customer feedback. This is implemented and monitored by the Access Workgroup.

Consultation and audiences

- The Museum will regularly consult and evaluate its services with users and use this information to ensure our services meet their needs, as outlined in our Evaluation Policy.
- We will consult with non-users to identify barriers to participation.
- The Museum is committed to developing and widening its audiences through its Audience Development Plan.

Community links and outreach

- The Museum is committed to maintaining a Community Engagement Strategy to develop its links to new and existing audiences, especially through partnership with other community and educational organisations.
- The Museum will maintain outreach options for those who are unable to visit the Museum, particularly the Loan and Memory box schemes for audiences in schools, care homes and hospitals.
- The Museum is committed to providing volunteer opportunities and seeks to recruit volunteers from diverse backgrounds. The recruitment and management of volunteers is guided by our Volunteer Policy.

Premises

- The Museum operates from three sites: Reading Museum & Town Hall, Riverside Museum and a store.
- The Museum is committed to providing full access to all areas of its buildings, and facilities. There are some limitations due to the physical constraints of listed buildings, especially in office areas and store areas.
- Information for potential visitors explaining our opening times, services and access to the collections is available on leaflets, by telephone, via e-mail, social media and on our website.

Collections

- The Museum is committed to increasing public access to the collections and information and to increasing knowledge and understanding of the collections and heritage.
- We will provide varied means of access to the collections including displays, temporary exhibitions, loans, object handling, events and activities.
- Collection staff will be available every Thursday afternoon in the Box Room to answer questions and identify objects brought in by the public.
- To increase access to collections not on display we offer research facilities, web-based resources and access to staff.
- Stored collections are available to view by appointment with the collection team. The research facility at our off-site store has limited access for wheelchair users but alternative arrangements can be provided for access to most objects in the collection.
- Collections are continually being updated and developed to better reflect the diversity of the local area.

Information

- The needs of visitors are taken into account when preparing and presenting collections information and interpretation in the galleries and online.
- The Museum will ensure that all information and communications (including leaflets, labels and website) follow good practice and the Museum's guidelines for text and style.
- The Museum aims to keep the public informed of its collections, temporary displays and events through appropriate publicity including social media.
- We will provide levels of information and interpretation to suit a range of audiences and abilities.
- Information on displays will be provided in a range of formats, for example labels, large print, film, interactives and audio, as resources allow.
- The Museum aims to present labels, displays, online and marketing materials that respect a diversity of backgrounds. Images and/or descriptions of the Museum will reflect the diversity of the community.
- The Museum website has accessibility features including user defined text size and colours.

Learning and programming

- The Museum will provide a range of suitable handling materials drawn from the collections for different audiences and levels of ability.
- We will provide learning programmes that are tailored to the needs and requirements of specific groups and audiences.
- Educational materials will be made available for different audiences and abilities, as required and as resources allow.
- Temporary exhibitions, events and activities will be programmed throughout the year for people with a wide range of abilities.

Customer Care

- All staff members are involved in implementing this policy, assisting and welcoming our customers.
- The Museum will work within the framework of the Reading Borough Council Customer Charter (Appendix A).
- All users of the Museum will be treated with equal respect within an inclusive atmosphere and welcomed according to their individual needs.
- Where possible, the venues will provide baby changing facilities, access and parking for pushchairs and seating for the comfort and ease of visitors.
- Wherever possible, the venues will provide adequate signage and navigation to suit a range of needs, and will respond to requests made by the public regarding information required in alternative formats, as resources allow.
- We provide visitor facilities to meet our customers' needs at the Museum including a shop and café.
- The Museum is committed to providing a safe environment for all. It has procedures for the safe evacuation of all users and staff in an emergency. There is a policy and procedure for Child Protection and Vulnerable Adults.

Staff and training

- Reading Borough Council is an equal opportunities employer. All people will receive equal opportunities in recruitment, employment and training. The Museum is committed to increasing the diversity of its workforce.
- As part of a staff induction process, new staff will receive disability awareness training, including addressing the needs of visitors with specific requirements, appropriate use of language and assisting those with disabilities during the evacuation procedure.

- Staff will receive training in areas of awareness and equality legislation appropriate to their roles and needs. This will be identified during induction and the annual appraisal process.

Financial

- All Museum venues have free admission.
- The Museum will provide some activities free of charge so that all parts of the community can enjoy its services.
- Volunteers should not be deterred from offering their services because they feel they cannot afford to volunteer. The Museum's Volunteer Policy sets out the circumstances in which travelling expenses can be offered.

APPENDIX A - READING BOROUGH COUNCIL Customer Charter

We aim to...

- get things right first time
- answer telephone calls within 20 seconds within office hours
- respond to letters within 5 working days, or if a full response cannot be sent in this time, an acknowledgement will be sent in two working days advising when a full response may be expected.
- see customers within 10 minutes of presenting at our receptions within office hours
- acknowledge emails and web enquiries within 24 working hours and a full response sent within the letter response standard.
- acknowledge any complaints with 5 working days

We will:

- wear identity badges or uniforms at all times when on Council business
- offer customers a private setting to talk about confidential matters
- where possible offer customers whose first language is not English the services of an interpreter or translator

We will not:

- always be able to give you what you want. If we cannot we will, where possible, offer you options or alternatives.
- accept any form of abuse or discriminatory behaviour against our staff or our customers.

Customer Care Excellence Award

If you would like to nominate a member of staff for a Customer Care Excellence Award visit www.reading.gov.uk and fill out the online form or you can pick up a leaflet from Council receptions.

Making a Complaint

Reading Borough Council recognises there will be occasions when things go wrong. Your complaint is the first step in helping us put matters right. Remember - we need to know what you think so we can get it right!

Visit www.reading.gov.uk to find out how to make a complaint or pick up a leaflet from Council receptions.

Open for Business

Open for business	Hours	Actions
Direct published lines	Min 9-5 Mon-Fri	All services with published lines to ensure no voice mail used on those lines
Web	24/7	In place