

CABINET MEMBER DELEGATED DECISION – SAFER & STRONGER COMMUNITIES – 12 DECEMBER 2011

OXFORDSHIRE MUSEUMS SERVICE HUMAN REMAINS POLICY

Report by Director of Social and Community Services

Introduction

1. The activities of the Oxfordshire Museums Service in respect of the collections it acquires and holds in trust for the County are governed by the Oxfordshire Museums Service Acquisitions and Disposals Policy (2005). This policy defines what the Service collects, how it cares for that material, makes it accessible to the public and, if necessary, disposes of items from the collection. Since the last revision of this Policy in 2005, however, as a result of developments elsewhere in the Museums sector and beyond it has become clear that a separate policy is required to deal with the very specific issues which can arise in relation to the curation of human remains.

Scope of the Policy

2. The definition used in this Policy refers to skeletal and soft tissue parts of Homo sapiens, including hair and nails, and artefacts made of human and other components. Types of human remains in the Museums Service's archaeology collections are unmodified skeletal remains and cremated remains from Oxfordshire sites excavated since the 1960s. They are of prehistoric, Roman and medieval date. There are currently 422 entries of human skeletal remains on the Service's collection's data-base. The Social History collections do not contain human remains.
3. As custodians of human remains the Museums Service has a duty, acting on behalf of the County Council, to keep the remains appropriately and to consider applications for their return from those who have a claim on them. This policy therefore sets out how the Museums Service curates, researches and displays the human remains in its care. It also provides guidance to those seeking to submit a claim for the return of human remains as to how a claim may be made, the procedure for considering and responding to claims and the circumstances in which a claim may be accepted.

Consultation

4. In devising a Human Remains Policy for the collections in its care the Museums Service is adhering to best practice as in the Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums published by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) in October 2005
5. In developing this Policy the Museums Service has drawn heavily upon the experience of other Museums holding significant collections of human remains and who have experience of handling requests for the repatriation.

Notable amongst these are the British Museum, The Pitt Rivers Museum and the University of Manchester.

6. Consultation has also taken place with the local archaeological community and the draft policy has been tested against two recent requests for repatriation from faith communities in the county.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

7. The Human Remains Policy supports the Council's strategic objective of providing efficient and effective public services by adopting a standard for the care of human remains and providing accessible information for those who wish to request repatriation of human remains.

Financial and Staff Implications

8. The Human Remains Policy codifies the practices and procedures currently in place and its formal adoption would have no additional financial or staffing implications

RECOMMENDATION

9. The Cabinet Member is **RECOMMENDED** to endorse the Human Remains Policy 2011.

JOHN JACKSON
Director for Social and Community Services

Background papers: Nil

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