
Report To:	Education & Communities Committee	Date:	20 May 2025
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Subject:	Watt Institution Collections Care and Conservation Policy		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 ☒ For Decision ☐ For Information/Noting
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to present to Committee for approval the Watt Institution's updated Collections Care and Conservation Policy.
- 1.3 This policy overtakes the previous McLean Museum Collections Care and Conservation policy, updated to reflect the overarching Watt Institution statement of purpose, and better reflect the operational priorities of the Watt Institution. The policy is essential for the purpose of Museum Accreditation and forms part of a suite of policies and associated procedures which support accountable collections management.
- 1.4 The policy supports Council officers with responsibility for collections management in a museum setting when making decisions that shape the historic collections held in trust by the Council. It provides a set of principles that guide care and conservation of these collections.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Education and Communities Committee is recommended to
- note the contents of this report; and
 - approve the Collections Care and Conservation Policy in Appendix 1

Ruth Binks
Corporate Director
Education, Communities and Organisational Development

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Watt Institution comprises the McLean Museum and Art Gallery; the James Watt Library; and Inverclyde Archives. It is the main museum in the Inverclyde area and houses Inverclyde Council's municipal collections. These collections extend to museum objects; historic books; and archival materials.
- 3.2 The McLean Museum – as part of the Watt Institution – holds Accredited Museum status. As part of the Accreditation process, the museum is required to have in place a Collections Care and Conservation policy to support the accountable management of the historic collections held in trust for the people of Inverclyde.
- 3.3 The Collections Care and Conservation policy currently in place for the McLean Museum is subject to five-year review. This updated Collections Care and Conservation policy supersedes the previous 2022 policy. It sets a framework for the preservation of the collections and buildings in the care of the Council; preventative and remedial conservation of collections; and the safe use of and access to collections, within the limits of existing resources.
- 3.4 Approval of the Watt Institution Collections Care and Conservation policy is required in support of the McLean Museum and Art Gallery's Accredited Museum status. The policy – attached as Appendix 1 – reflects sector best practice guidance, including SPECTRUM (the UK collection management standard).
- 3.5 Accredited Museum status recognises achievement of professional standards and supports the Watt Institution to access external funding to the benefit of the McLean Museum and Art Gallery and associated collections.
- 3.6 The Collections Care and Conservation policy includes an acknowledgement of work ongoing by the Watt Institution to address collections care and conservation priorities going forward, with particular reference to the Natural Sciences collection – a key founding element of the Watt's wider historic collections.
- 3.7 The policy outlines guiding principles across people, buildings and collections to ensure the safety and long-term survival of the historic collections held in trust by the Council. This includes training requirements; regular inspections of buildings and premises; and key areas of focus to inform current and future planning.

4.0 PROPOSALS

- 4.1 It is proposed that this updated policy better reflects the current operation of the Watt Institution as a single heritage site encompassing the McLean Museum and Art Gallery; the James Watt Library; and Inverclyde Archives.
- 4.2 It is proposed that Committee approve the renamed Watt Institution Collections Care and Conservation policy, which better reflects the operational needs of the Watt Institution. The format of this policy document has also been updated to reflect the Council's recently revised standard policy template.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO
Financial		X
Legal/Risk	X	
Human Resources		X
Strategic (Partnership Plan/Council Plan)		X
Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People's Rights & Wellbeing		X
Environmental & Sustainability		X
Data Protection		X

5.2 Legal/Risk

Should approval not be granted, there is a risk that the McLean Museum and Art Gallery may lose its Accredited Museum status, which carries the following associated risks:

- a direct negative financial impact on the delivery of museum services due to exclusion from external funding streams (specifically Museums Galleries Scotland; and National Lottery Heritage Fund).
- potential for reputational damage to Inverclyde Council

5.3 Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People

(a) Equalities

This report has been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) process with the following outcome:

	YES – Assessed as relevant and an EqIA is required.
X	NO – This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, assessed as not relevant and no EqIA is required. Provide any other relevant reasons why an EqIA is not necessary/screening statement.

(b) Fairer Scotland Duty

If this report affects or proposes any major strategic decision:-

Has there been active consideration of how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome?

	YES – A written statement showing how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage has been completed.
X	NO – Assessed as not relevant under the Fairer Scotland Duty for the following reasons: Provide reasons why the report has been assessed as not relevant.

(c) Children and Young People

Has a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – Assessed as relevant and a CRWIA is required.
X	NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve a new policy, function or strategy or recommends a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy which will have an impact on children's rights.

5.7 Environmental/Sustainability

N/A

Has a Strategic Environmental Assessment been carried out?

	YES – assessed as relevant and a Strategic Environmental Assessment is required.
X	NO – This report does not propose or seek approval for a plan, policy, programme, strategy or document which is like to have significant environmental effects, if implemented.

5.8 Data Protection

Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – This report involves data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.
X	NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.

6.0 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 This policy has been prepared in discussion with colleagues at the Watt Institution; it meets the requirements of the Museum Accreditation Scheme and utilises peer-reviewed resources available via the Collections Trust to ensure its content meets nationally agreed standards of good practice.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 [SPECTRUM – the UK Collection Management Standard](#)

Organisational Development, Human Resources and Performance

Collections Care and Conservation Policy: Watt Institution

Version No 2.0

Produced by:

Inverclyde Council
Municipal Buildings
GREENOCK
PA15 1LX

2025

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DOCUMENT CONTROL

Document Responsibility		
Policy Title	Corporate Group	Service
Collections Care and Conservation Policy	CCER	Cultural Services

Change History		
Version	Date	Comments
2.0	6/05/25	Policy amended to updated policy template. Statement of Purpose amended to reference the Watt Institution complex, encompassing the McLean Museum and Art Gallery; James Watt Library; and Inverclyde Archives.

Distribution
Education & Communities Committee; Director of Education, Communities and OD; Head of Service Communities, Culture and Education Resources; Cultural Services Manager; Watt Institution Team Leader; Coordinator; and officers.

Policy Review		
Updating Frequency	Next Review Date	Responsible Officer
5 years	January 2027	Cultural Services Manager

Policy Review and Approval			
Name	Action	Date	Communication

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Collections Care and Conservation policy outlines the general principles which underpin the care, conservation and preservation of the historic collections held in trust by Inverclyde Council.

The policy is written in accordance with the Watt Institution's statement of purpose, and should be read alongside the Watt Institution Collections Development Policy.

All Watt Institution staff and volunteers are asked to read and abide by this policy.

In line with the organisational planning cycle, associated collections care and conservation actions will form part of the Cultural Services Improvement Plan, on an annually reviewed basis.

The McLean Museum, as part of the Watt Institution, holds Accredited Museum Status. Accreditation is the UK sector standard for museums and galleries, and is administered in Scotland by Museum Galleries Scotland (MGS) (the sector body for museums).

As part of the Accreditation process, the museum is required to have in place a Collections Care and Conservation policy. The Collections Care and Conservation policy is typically subject to a five year review, in line with the Accreditation cycle. This policy – updated in line with the Council's standard policy template – supersedes the Collections Care and Conservation policy 2022.

Key changes since the last policy review include:

- an update of the policy document in line with Inverclyde Council's standard policy template
- an update of the McLean Museum statement of purpose to the Watt Institution statement of purpose, encompassing the McLean Museum and Art Gallery; James Watt Library; and Inverclyde Archives.

1.2 BACKGROUND

The previous Collections Care and Conservation policy was approved by Committee in 2022 and was included in the McLean Museum and Art Gallery's most recent Accreditation submission. This version has been updated to bring the policy in line with the Council's standard policy template.

The Collections Care and Conservation policy takes cognisance of sector standards, and sets a framework for the:

- preservation of the buildings and collections in our care;
- preventative and remedial conservation of our collections; and
- safe use of and access to our collections, within the limits of our resources.

A written Collections Care and Conservation policy provides curatorial guidance, in conjunction with the Collections Development policy; Emergency Preparedness Plan; and any other plans developed that affect the collections and museum buildings.

1.3 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The museum seeks to improve the care and conditions of all our collections in accordance with the appropriate sector standards; for example [Benchmarks in Collections Care](#).

The safety and preservation of the collection will be considered from the outset of any plans to alter the displays or storage, to modify the buildings or to allow access to any part of the collections.

As activity to audit and document collections is undertaken, this information will be made accessible to the public, as appropriate. Information will be shared through digital platforms, display information and interpretation, and/or programmed events, in order to communicate how we look after our collections for the public benefit.

1.4 AIM

This policy aims to provide a context for the ongoing care and conservation of collection objects across the Watt Institution.

1 SCOPE

This policy sets a framework for the:

- preservation of the buildings and collections in our care;
- preventative and remedial conservation of our collections; and
- safe use of and access to our collections, within the limits of our resources

This policy supports Council officers with responsibility for collections management in a museum or archive setting when making decisions about the care and conservation of historic collections held in trust by the Council. It provides a set of principles that guide collections care and conservation across the museum service.

A Collections Care and Conservation policy is essential for the purpose of Museum Accreditation, and forms part of a suite of policies and associated procedures that support accountable collections management.

2 POLICY CONTENT

3.1 Statement of Purpose

The Watt Institution's statement of purpose is:

The Watt Institution – encompassing the McLean Museum and Art Gallery; James Watt Library; and Inverclyde Archives – exists to enhance and enrich the learning, leisure and cultural experiences of the people who live, work and visit in Inverclyde.

3.2 People

- 3.2.1 Ensuring our collections are cared for is the responsibility of everyone who works in or visits the Watt Institution. Any concerns regarding the care of collections should be reported in writing to the Watt Institution Coordinator.
- 3.2.2 Staff and volunteers who – in the course of their daily work – have to handle collections will all receive appropriate training. No untrained personnel are allowed to handle artefacts from the Watt's collections.
- 3.2.3 Researchers or other visitors working with collections will be briefed on how to handle the artefacts they are working with, and will be supervised at all times.
- 3.2.4 Only professionally Accredited Conservators listed on the Conservation Register will be employed to advise or work on the collections.

No item in the collection will be modified or altered until advice has been obtained from a suitably qualified and Accredited Conservator, and then only following written confirmation of the work to be undertaken and the rationale behind it.

The conservator undertaking such work must provide the museum with full written documentation of all works undertaken as well as pictorial evidence of pre, during and post works, in line with SPECTRUM standards.

The museum will keep detailed records of all treatments carried out on all artefacts, including the name and contact details of the person or company.

3.3 Buildings

- 3.3.1 The museum recognises that a programme of regular professional maintenance is fundamental to the long term preservation of both our buildings and collections. To support this we will work in partnership with Inverclyde Council's Property Services team to ensure we keep our buildings in a condition appropriate to their use.
- 3.3.2 Our collections are stored and / or displayed in the following buildings. The body responsible for the upkeep of the buildings is listed.

Building	Used for	Owner	Upkeep carried out by
Watt Institution*	McLean Museum & Art Gallery, Watt Library & Inverclyde Archives	Inverclyde Council	Inverclyde Council
Municipal Buildings*	Council Headquarters	Inverclyde Council	Inverclyde Council
Kingston Unit	Store	Inverclyde Council	Inverclyde Council
Muirshiel Regional Park –	Regional Park Visitor Centre	Inverclyde Council	Inverclyde Council

Greenock Cut Centre			
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*Grade A listed buildings

- 3.3.3 Between 2017 and 2020 the Watt Institution was closed and underwent a major programme of building conservation. The Council's Property Services team ensure that contracts are in place to ensure all statutory requirements around building safety and security are met in line with regularity requirements.
- 3.3.4 Regular inspections of all buildings are undertaken on a rolling basis, and issues are raised and actioned as they are identified. All works are overseen by the Council's Property Services team.

3.4 Collections

- 3.4.1 Watt Institution officers are aware of the myriad potential risks to the historic collections held by the Council, including – for example – environmental or security factors, poor handling, inappropriate storage and/or display, incorrect use of materials and methods, etc. Consequently there is a need to regularly, physically check on and record the condition of the collections.
- 3.4.2 Key areas to be considered when ensuring the safety and long-term survival of the historic collections held in trust are overtaken by associated plans, as relevant, and include:
- an awareness of vulnerable objects, be they in store or on display, and required mitigations;
 - identifying threats to collection objects, and required mitigations;
 - regularly checking the condition of buildings and documenting and reporting issues/potential issues;
 - undertaking an agreed and planned regular programme of building maintenance;
 - inspecting and cleaning the museum on a daily basis;
 - ensuring high standards of housekeeping;
 - ensuring artefacts on open display are regularly cleaned;
 - ensuring the collection is condition checked on a regular basis and the results and any resultant actions authorised and noted;
 - ensuring accurate collections care and conservation records are kept and updated;
 - undertaking regular environmental monitoring including temperature, relative humidity, light and dust and acting on the results as the situation requires
 - environmental control and improving the environment;
 - regular training for colleagues involved in working with the collections;
 - the development of an Integrated Pest Management Strategy, ensuring buildings and collections are regularly monitored for pests and mitigation put in place;
 - all equipment is maintained and the appropriate records kept;
 - appropriate storage materials and methods are used;
 - appropriate display materials and methods are used;
 - appropriate resources in place to ensure the care of collections; and

- appropriate professional advice is sought as situation demands before undertaking work on collection objects or buildings.

3.4.3 The collection does not contain any historical working items that require regular maintenance.

3.4.4 The Watt Institution holds a historic and diverse natural sciences collection. One of the Watt's largest collections, its origins lie in the founding of the museum increasing its significance to the venue. As fashions in displays and collections changed it has, bar a few large specimens, long been removed from display and dispersed across storage sites. However, the untapped potential of this collection as a learning resource encompassing contemporary issues around conservation and the climate crisis is recognized.

To begin to release this potential museum officers have engaged with external experts to seek advice on condition, safe handling, transportation and storage of these collections. How advice received is actioned will inform future service development plans. This work also feeds into the National Museums of Scotland's 'Natural Science Collections Across Scotland' project to increase access to, and knowledge of, natural sciences collections.

3.5 Review

Compliance with this policy and progress in implementing Collections Care and Conservation actions will be assessed as part of the Council's annual planning process as well as in addressing matters outlined in our Service Improvement Plan. The policy will be due for review in January 2027, in line with the museum Accreditation cycle.

4 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

4.1 ELECTED MEMBERS

Elected Members should be aware of the requirements of this policy, particularly with regards the role of the governing body in obligations relating to the care and conservation of historic collections.

4.2 CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Chief Executive should be aware of the requirements of this policy, particularly with regards the role of the governing body in obligations relating to the care and conservation of historic collections.

4.3 DIRECTORS

Directors should be aware of the requirements of this policy, particularly with regards the role of the governing body in obligations relating to the care and conservation of historic collections.

4.4 HEADS OF SERVICE

Heads of Service should be aware of the requirements of this policy, particularly with regards the role of the governing body in obligations relating to the care and conservation of historic collections.

4.5. SERVICE MANAGERS

The Service Manager has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this Collections Care and Conservation Policy.

4.6 OFFICERS

Officers should be aware of the requirements of this policy and meet these in operational service delivery.

5 IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 TRAINING

Specific training on the content of this policy is delivered as required.

5.2 COMMUNICATION OF THE POLICY

This policy will be available publically via the Council website.

6 RISK

6.1 LEGISLATIVE RISK

N/A.

6.2 WIDER RISKS

Without this policy the McLean Museum and Art Gallery, as part of the wider Watt Institution, would fail to meet the Museum Accreditation Standard. This in turn could expose the Council to wider financial and reputational risks.

7 EQUALITIES

7.1 CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

This policy meets the requirements of the Museum Accreditation Scheme and utilises peer-reviewed resources available via the Collections Trust to ensure its content meets nationally agreed standards of good practice.

This policy will be further reviewed as per the policy review schedule specified.

7.2 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

There is no evidence to indicate that this policy could affect employees differently or less favourably, on the grounds of their Protected Characteristics.