

## ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL'S MUSEUMS SERVICE LOSS POLICY

### Policy Summary

<b>Policy Status</b>	Approved and finalised by the committee on <b>04/09/2025</b>
<b>Responsible Officer</b>	Amy Miller, Museum Development Co-ordinator
<b>Policy Sponsor</b>	Chris Murphy, Service Manager, Live Life Aberdeenshire
<b>Authorised By</b>	Area Committee – Communities Committee
<b>Policy Review Date</b>	04/09/2030

### 1. Policy Statement

Aberdeenshire Museums Service maintains, develops, researches, conserves, and provides access to historic and artistic collections held in trust for by Aberdeenshire Council for future generations.

The Loss policy enable Aberdeenshire Council's Museums Service to respond to the discovery of damage or loss, documenting all decisions and actions. It defines the permitted purposes, circumstances, authorisation levels and minimum documentation required in case of a loss or damage of objects. It also defines necessary responses to loss and damage and the appropriate follow-up action.

### 2. Scope of Policy

This Policy applies to:

- 2.1 Operations at Live Life Aberdeenshire Museums facilities including the Discovery Centre / Museum HQ, Aberdeenshire Farming Museum, and Banchory Museum.
- 2.2 Accessioned items or significant parts of accessioned items which currently form part of the permanent collections.
- 2.3 Items on loan to Aberdeenshire Council's Museums Service.
- 2.4 Items being moved by a contractor from one site or branch to another, or from one branch to a non-Aberdeenshire Council Museums Service destination.
- 2.5 Loss or damage can be caused by environmental factors, accidental damage, wilful damage, theft or temporary loss.
- 2.6 The period of time which should elapse before an object is considered to be formally lost or stolen, rather than mislaid, will depend on circumstances. An object on display



is unlikely to be mislaid and will normally be reported as stolen immediately. An object missing from one of the stores is more likely to have been mislaid; in this case, initial enquiries will be made within the museum service before formal notification is made of loss.

### **3. Policy Principles & Equalities**

- 3.1 As a responsible custodian of public collections, the Museums Service is required to review its museum policies every five years. This is an essential element of fulfilling the nationally agreed standards of our Accreditation status.
- 3.2 This suite of documents cover a range of requirements and are presented to Communities Committee for approval as the governing body.
- 3.3 Approval of these policies is essential to maintain Spectrum museum documentation procedural standards and fulfil national requirements set by Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS).
- 3.4 The intervening period since the last review has seen significant changes for Aberdeenshire Museums Service; notably the appointment of a new professional team and a multi-million pound investment from the UK Government in a new museum representing the whole of Aberdeenshire. As a team we now have a far better understanding of our facilities and collections and this knowledge has resulted in a refocus as we plan for the next five years.
- 3.5 During the development and review of policies, Officers and Elected Members are legally required to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Fairer Scotland Duty.

### **4. Purpose**

- 4.1 Loss is defined as the management and documentation of items accessioned by Aberdeenshire Council's Museums Service, or on loan to it, suffering loss or damage while in the responsibility and care of the Museums Service.
- 4.2 The term "loss" is used throughout this Policy with this meaning and no other.
- 4.3 Loss refers solely to Aberdeenshire Council's Museums Service's accessioned items and items on loan to it, which have suffered loss or damage while in the responsibility and care of the Museums Service and is not intended to mirror Aberdeenshire Council's Museums Service's Exit Policy.
- 4.4 The purpose of the Policy is to enable Aberdeenshire Council's Museums Service to respond to the discovery of damage or loss, documenting all decisions and actions.

### **5. Scope**

- 5.1 This Policy applies to:
  - a. All sites and branches of Aberdeenshire Council's Museums Service.



- b. Accessioned items or significant parts of accessioned items which currently form part of the permanent collections.
  - c. Items on loan to Aberdeenshire Council's Museums Service.
  - d. Items being moved by a contractor from one site or branch to another, or from one branch to a non-Aberdeenshire Council Museums Service destination.
- 5.2 Loss or damage can be caused by environmental factors, accidental damage, wilful damage, theft or temporary loss.
- 5.3 The period of time which should elapse before an object is considered to be formally lost or stolen, rather than mislaid, will depend on circumstances. An object on display is unlikely to be mislaid and will normally be reported as stolen immediately. An object missing from one of the stores is more likely to have been mislaid; in this case, initial enquiries will be made within the museum service before formal notification is made of loss.

## **6. Liability, Insurance and Indemnity**

- 6.1 In all circumstances, the liability for loss or damage falls upon Aberdeenshire Council's Museums Service. This is particularly so in the case of material on loan to the Museums Service from any external individual or organisation.
- 6.2 Objects and other material may have rights associated with them (e.g. copyright).

## **7. Authorisation**

- 7.1 Only authorised staff may verify the Loss of an item from Aberdeenshire Council's Museums Service and/or the permanent collections or on loan to the Museums Service.
- 7.2 Authorised staff must ensure that all necessary steps have been taken to inform the relevant external bodies regarding the Loss, including ensuring that all documentation has been prepared.
- 7.3 In the case of Damage to items on loan to the Museums Service, authorised staff must ensure that the lender is informed of the circumstances and that any remedial conservation work to be carried out by Aberdeenshire Council's Museums Service has been agreed with the lender.
- 7.4 Authorised staff are:
- a. Museums Development Co-ordinator
  - b. Museum Curator
  - c. Museum Conservator

## **8. Response to Damage**

- 8.1 Where appropriate, the steps outlined in the Emergency Plan for immediate action, evacuation of collections and first aid to damaged objects will be followed.



- 8.2 For objects on loan to Aberdeenshire Council's Museums Service, inform the owner immediately.
- 8.3 The movement of damaged objects will be under the supervision of a Conservator, where practicable.
- 8.4 As per Spectrum 5.0, record for each object or group of objects which have suffered damage the following:
- Date(s) of the discovery and reporting of the damage
  - Names and details of those involved in the discovery and reporting of the damage
  - Details of the circumstances of the damage
  - Details of the objects
  - Details of the damage and references to any condition report

## **9. Response to Loss**

- 9.1 Loss occurs when, as a result of audit or otherwise, an object(s) cannot be located or identified (but see section 7 above).
- 9.2 On the discovery of a loss by theft or other incident, all necessary authorities will be informed. This normally includes the following:
- Person responsible for the object(s)
  - Site museum staff
  - Police (where appropriate)
  - External agencies or specialists
- 9.3 Although the initial report may be verbal, a written report will be made as soon as is possible. Copies of all correspondence and records of all telephone calls associated with the theft will be retained. References to these will be recorded.
- 9.4 The exact number and nature of the missing object(s) will be confirmed and all relevant documentation relating to the object(s) will be retrieved.
- 9.5 For objects on loan to Aberdeenshire Council's Museums Service, inform the owner immediately.
- 9.6 In the case of theft, the police will be provided with photographs and other descriptive material required to identify the object.
- 9.7 As per Spectrum 5.0, the following will be recorded:
- Date(s) of the discovery and reporting of the loss
  - Names and details of those involved in the discovery and reporting of the loss
  - Details of the circumstances of the loss
  - Details of the objects

## **10. Follow-up Action**



- 10.1 Inform the relevant insurance company, insurance advisor or indemnity provider of the loss as appropriate.
- 10.2 For thefts, inform appropriate authorities including:
  - a. Museums Galleries Scotland
  - b. Appropriate stolen property publications (e.g. Trace)

## **11. Recovery of Thefts**

- 11.1 Thefts may be recovered after months, or even years. All documentation relating to the object and its loss will be retained, even if it is never found.
- 11.2 If an object is recovered, record the new location and update the details on the loss.

## **12. How long, and in what form, Loss Information is held**

Loss information will be retained in perpetuity by Aberdeenshire Council's Museums Service, in electronic or manual form.

## **13. Exceptions**

There are no exceptions to this Policy, other than those explicitly defined in the Scope section.

## **14. Review**

This Policy is subject to review every five years. The next date for review is 31 March 2025. The Policy may be reviewed at an earlier date if necessary.

The following sector guidance and policy documents have assisted in the creation of this policy:

- [Collections Trust Spectrum standard for museum collections management](#)
- [Museums Association Code of Ethics](#)
- [Museum Accreditation Standard](#)
- [Standing Conference on Archives and Museums' Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom](#)
- [ICON Professional Standards and Judgement & Ethics](#)
- [UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property](#)
- [Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Scottish Museum Collections](#)
- [Statement of Principles relating to the Spoliation of Works of Art during the Nazi, Holocaust and World War II period](#)
- [CITES multilateral treaty](#)



**15. Council Strategic Priorities**

<b>Pillar</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>How does the policy reflect the Council's strategic Priorities?</b>
A sustainable economy	We will support a strong and diverse economy by attracting people of working age to our region, complementing our highly skilled local workforce.	This policy helps to deliver Council priorities Connected Communities, Living Well Locally as the Museum Service and its policies underpin access to high quality cultural experiences with an increased sense of place and local connection that promote positive social interactions, lifelong learning, improve wellbeing and reduce mental health issues in all ages.
Connected communities	We will work with communities and partners to enhance the sense of connection among our places. This includes supporting communities to come up with innovative solutions to ensure our places are resilient and vibrant.	
Living well locally	We will encourage and support our residents to lead healthy and active lives and contribute meaningfully to their communities. We will make proactive choices that will allow us to cater to the needs of our increasingly ageing population.	

**16. Policy Revision**

<b>Version Number</b>	<b>Revision Date</b>	<b>Committee Approval Date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>
2.0	12/05/2025	04/09/2025	<p>Throughout the document, update to latest Spectrum version of 5.1.</p> <p>Section 17, Response to Damage: Images of the damage have been added as a mandatory part of the recording procedure.</p> <p>Section 27, Follow- up action: Per this new version the Service is now obligated to have an internal review of the situation surrounding the loss with a view to lessons learnt.</p>



**17. Policy Distribution**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Allan Rae	Head of Service, Communities, Wellbeing and Partnerships	Aberdeenshire Council
Chris Murphy	Service Manager, Programme Development	Aberdeenshire Council
Saskia Gibbon	Cultural Engagement Manager	Aberdeenshire Council
Douglas Henderson	Senior Insurance Officer	Aberdeenshire & Aberdeen City Councils
Jacob O'Sullivan	Museum Development Manager – Collections & Interpretation	Museums Galleries Scotland
	Current Lenders	Various
	Potential Lenders	Various

**[ENDS]**