



Access Policy

2025-2030

Name of Museum: Wirral Museums Service (The Williamson Art Gallery and Museum, Birkenhead Priory and St. Mary's Tower)

Name of Governing Body: Wirral Borough Council

Date of Authorisation by Governing Body: 10.6.2025

Policy Review Procedure: The Access Policy will be published and reviewed at least once every five years.

Date on which this policy is due for review: 10.6.2030

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1: Introduction

- 1.1 The Williamson Art Gallery and Museum (hereafter the Williamson) is a public museum located in Birkenhead. Its collections are diverse, ranging from fine and decorative arts to social and natural history.
- 1.2. Birkenhead Priory and St. Mary's Tower (hereafter the Priory) is a museum based in one of the oldest sites in the entirety of Merseyside, it holds a small collection of archaeology.
- 1.3. The following document outlines the Wirral Museums Service's commitment to providing equal access to its collection, exhibitions, activities, and facilities and broadly sets out a framework for how this will be achieved.
- 1.4. This policy, therefore, contains one central aim:
 - Outline how Wirral Museums Service can eliminate or reduce barriers so all audiences have equal access to its collection, buildings, facilities, and services.

2: Aims and Statement of Purpose

- 2.1. The following document has been written in accordance with the Williamson's Statement of Purpose and Collections Development Policy.
- 2.2. The Williamson's Statement of Purpose:

'To make the exploration of Wirral's life and history an interesting and entertaining experience, accessible to all sections of society'.

- 2.3. The Williamson's Key Aims:

- To collect items of local, regional, national, and international importance to reflect Wirral's life and history, and to place that in a meaningful context.
- To encourage and enable access to museums collections by all sections of society.
- To ensure the on-going development of the learning opportunities within the Museums Service.
- To continue to develop the sites and venues of the Museums Service through core funding and capital investment programmes, and to secure external investment.
- To attract visitors and tourists to Wirral through the promotion of the Museums Service.

3: Policy Context

- 3.1. This policy is part of a corpus of other plans and policies relating to the operation of Wirral Museums Service and its collections. The other policies and plans add more specific detail for how the access aims of Wirral Museums Service will be achieved.
- 3.2. These documents include the Wirral Museums Service's:
 - Access Plan
 - Documentation Procedural Manual
 - Documentation Plan
 - Collections Development Policy
 - Care and Conservation Policy
 - Care and Conservation Plan
 - Forward Plan

4: Access Assessment and Plan

- 4.1. As part of its process for creating its Access Plan and Policy, Wirral Museums Service has commenced an Access Assessment and consultation process with its visitor base.
- 4.2. Assessments were carried out for both of its sites, with visitor feedback surveys carried out both physically and digitally at the Williamson and Priory. These surveys tracked who was coming to the gallery (and who was not) when compared to the demographics of the local area, as well as any comments and feedback that visitors had. Feedback has also been sought through other means, such as through reviews and consultation from community groups that Wirral Museums Service has worked with, as well feedback from social media and review sites. The Town Fund project also provided means for consultation with community groups/stakeholders and other members of the local community.
- 4.3. As well as consultation with the public, Wirral Museums Service also carried out in-house assessments, utilising feedback from the public as well as a range of staff from varying levels of the service. The toolkits and checklists that made up these assessments were taken from respected institutions in the sector, such as the Museums, Libraries, and Archives Council and Museums Development (in collaboration with VocalEyes, Stagertext and DCN - Disability Collaborative Network for Museums).
- 4.4. The Access Assessment, and the resulting Plan, can be found in Wirral Museums Service's Access Plan. The findings from the assessment have been used to develop key action points for the Access Plan as well as the Service's Forward and Audience Development Plans.

5: Wirral Museums Service's Commitment to Access

- 5.1 As a Public Sector body, Wirral Museums Service is required to meet the obligations of the Equality Act 2010. This legislation lists protected characteristics as age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. Wirral Museums Service is legally bound to protect against discrimination, harassment, and victimisation of these protected characteristics. These protections apply to those who work or volunteer at Wirral Museums Service as well as those who are using or interacting with its services, exhibitions, and collections.
- 5.2 As well as the Equality Act 2010 Wirral Museums Service is also bound by:
 - Data Protection Act 1998
 - Freedom of Information Act 2000
 - Disability Discrimination Act 2005
 - Public Sector Equality Duty
- 5.3. As part of Wirral Council, the Wirral Museums Service is committed to the implementing Wirral Council's Interim 'Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy'.
- 5.4. Wirral Museums Service is bound by Wirral Council's 'Supporting Equality and Diversity in our Workforce' statement.
- 5.5. As part of Wirral Council, Wirral Museums Service's workforce equality data falls under Wirral Council's annual 'Workplace Monitoring Form'.
- 5.6. Wirral Museums Service's Access Policy, Plan, and Procedures have been created in line with national standards, ethical codes, and best practice guidelines including:
 - BS 8300 Design of buildings and meeting the needs of disabled people.
 - BS 8477:2007 Code of practice for customer service.
 - PAS 197:2009 Code of practice for cultural collections management.
 - PAS78 Guide to good practice for accessible websites.

6: Types of Access

- 6.1.** The term accessibility is a broad-ranging one that encompasses a variety of different meanings and audiences. To plan effectively for all access needs it is essential that these meanings are broadened and defined appropriately, as these different areas need to be addressed specifically. This section will therefore seek to define and explain these different facets of the term.
- 6.2. Physical Access:** Wirral Museums Service aims for the building and facilities within it to be physically accessible to all audiences.
- 6.3. Intellectual Access:** Wirral Museums Service aims for its exhibitions and services to be accessible to those with learning difficulties and for its programme to not be considered too specialist by audiences.
- 6.4. Attitudinal Access:** Wirral Museums Service aims for its front of house and customer-focused teams to provide the highest standards of customer care, so that all audiences feel welcome and comfortable in our facilities.
- 6.5. Economic Access:** Wirral Museums Service is committed to free access for all for its galleries and aims for its additional services to remain free or as affordable as possible.
- 6.6. Cultural Access:** Wirral Museums Service aims for its programme and services to be relevant to and reflective of a wide range of audiences and communities.
- 6.7. Sensory Access:** Wirral Museums Service aims for its buildings and services to be accessible to those with hearing or visual impairments, dementia, and autism.

7: Access Policies

7.1 Consultation and Different Audiences

- Wirral Museums Service is committed to regularly consulting with its audiences to understand who they are, what their needs are, and how these can be provided for.
- These consultations should also seek to focus on non-engaged audiences to see how the Wirral Museums Service can overcome the barriers to entry that these users face.
- The consultations should take the form of feedback from community groups, survey data and comments, and focus groups.
- This active consultation will inform access policies and plans developed by Wirral Museums Service. These documents will seek to provide a framework and process for how the needs of a range of audiences can be provided for.

7.2 Community Links and Outreach

- Wirral Museums Service is committed to engaging with a variety of local communities and collecting objects and artworks that are reflective of this local diversity.
- This will be facilitated through partnerships and co-production projects with local individuals, communities, and cultural organisations.
- Wirral Museums Service is committed to engaging with other organisations and networks that make their access and inclusion a core aim, whilst integrating with their strategies.
- Wirral Museums Service will host and provide a variety of programmes, activities, and events that cater to a wide range of audiences and visitor profiles.

7.3 Buildings

- Under the legal obligations of the Equality Act 2010, Wirral Museums Service will ensure that its physical space and procedures do not discriminate against disabled people.

- Wirral Museums Service will ensure that all galleries, exhibitions, learning spaces, hospitality spaces, toilets, and its information desk and car park are accessible to wheelchair users and those with other physical disabilities.
- The BSI's BS 8300 code of practice should be consulted when making decisions regarding the accessibility of Wirral Museums Service's buildings.
- It must be noted that due to the nature and age of the Williamson and Priory, some office spaces and stores are inaccessible to wheelchair users, but adjustments should be made where practicable and appropriate.
- Assistance dogs are welcome in the gallery and exhibition spaces.

7.4 Collections

- Wirral Museums Service is committed to its collections being as accessible as possible within funding and resource limits.
- Objects and artworks in the collection can be viewed by appointment with a member of the curatorial team present.
- Access to collections must be balanced against the appropriate care and management of the collection or objects in question. Should this risk be considered high, the request can be denied, or an appropriate risk assessment must be carried out before the viewing.
- Wirral Museums Service's collections will be made visible in a variety of ways, such as temporary displays and exhibitions, outward loans, events, digital spaces, and activities.
- It is also essential for access needs that Wirral Museums Service's collections have a full inventory and that as many objects as possible are made digitally available on its digital Collections Management System, eHive. More detailed information on this topic can be found in Wirral Museums Service's Documentation and Access Plans.
- The entire catalogued collection of Wirral Museums Service must be free to search on the Williamson's website.
- Wirral Museums Service, in particular the Williamson, works closely with Art UK to provide free and high quality digital content and exhibitions to its audiences.
- Collecting practices will continually evolve to better reflect historically underrepresented groups within Wirral Museums Service's collection.

7.5 Collection and Exhibition Information

- Wirral Museums Service will always consider user needs when preparing collections promotion, information, and context in its galleries.
- Wirral Museums Service will ensure that all information and communications, including its leaflets, interpretation, social media, and website, and exhibitions, follow the institution's own guidelines for text and style.
- Wirral Museums Service will keep its audiences informed of its collections, exhibitions, and events through appropriate publicity including social media, guides, and its websites.
- Wirral Museums Service aims to present labels, displays, online and marketing materials that respect a diversity of backgrounds.
- Wayfinding signage will be clear for all users of the building and museum maps will be provided at the information desk.
- The guidance of 'State of Museum Access 2018' will be followed where applicable and practicable to ensure that disabled visitors have accurate and easy-to-access information on the accessibility of the Wirral Museums Service's facilities and services.
- The primary interpretation method at the Wirral Museums Service's sites is text. It is imperative that all new text at Wirral Museums Service conforms to the conventions of the Service's 'Interpretation Style Guide'.

- Large versions of text at Wirral Museums Service should be available upon request, or already available within exhibition spaces.
- Any audio content within exhibition spaces should also have subtitles attached where relevant.
- Due to the demographics of the Wirral, the provision of foreign languages is not deemed a priority for Wirral Museums Service's interpretation.

7.6 Education

- Wirral Museums Service will provide learning programmes and activities that are in line with the needs of different users and audiences.
- Educational materials will be made available for different audiences and abilities.

7.7 Sensory

- Museum Assistants to be provided with training and skills to successfully communicate with and provide a quality service to people with visual or hearing impairments. Touch tours are also be provided on request where a trained member of staff is available.
- Hearing induction loop systems are to be provided where needed.
- Video-based exhibition elements will have subtitles if using spoken word.
- Wirral Museums Service's websites should at minimum meet the Web Accessibility Initiative's AA standard.

7.8 Staff and Training

- As part of Wirral Council, Wirral Museums Service is committed to equality of opportunity and all staff are currently obligated to complete equity, diversity, and inclusion online training.
- Wirral Museums Service will provide staff with in-person training in skills that enable all communities to feel welcome at its sites.

7.9 Economic

- Free entry will be maintained for all users at the Wirral Museums Service's sites.
- The Williamson is committed to providing free events in its exhibitions, such as talks, tours, and openings.
- When charging for services, such as some events and hospitality, Wirral Museums Service will ensure that prices are affordable.
- Wirral Museums Service is a member of the 'Own Art' scheme which enables affordable payment plans for specified artworks within exhibitions.

8: Next Review

8.1. The Access Policy requires review at least once every five years. The key dates for this process, as well as the latest review date, are noted on the title page of this document.