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**YMT Scrutiny Review Task Group**

**21 Nov2012**

Report of the Assistant Director IT & Governance

**York Museums Trust Scrutiny Review – Draft Final Report**

**Summary**

1. This report provides an update on the ongoing scrutiny review of York Museums Trust, and asks the Committee to agree a method for progressing the review and a timeframe for its completion.

**Background to the Formation of York Museums Trust**

2. In 2002 City of York Council entered into a partnership agreement with the newly constituted York Museums Trust (YMT) in order to ensure the long-term stability and prosperity of the City's museums and collections. The background to the decision to create YMT (a company limited by guarantee with charitable status) was the need to turnaround the business performance of the museums which had been losing an average of 37,000 visits every year over the previous ten years and were costing an extra £120k each year.
3. In July 2002, the Executive agreed to transfer operation of the museum service to the York Museums and Gallery Trust (YMT). By that date, YMT had already been formed, by a group of York citizens, as a company limited by guarantee with charitable status, governed by a board of trustees comprising a chair and ten to twelve members including two Councillors, a nominee of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society (YPS), and an individual nominated by the unions in consultation with the staff. YMT also has a trading company which covenants all profits back to the parent charity.
4. The key principles of the transfer were:
  - YMT would manage the Art Gallery, Castle Museum, St Mary's Church, and the Yorkshire Museum and Gardens.
  - The Council would retain ownership of the buildings and collections. It would loan these to YMT through formal agreements. In the case of those assets that are subject to existing trust deeds the Council would be the custodian trustee and YMT the managing trustee.
  - TUPE would apply to the transfer of staff.

- YMT would continue to provide the residents of York with free entry to the main collections.
  - Agreements between the Council and YMT would ensure that the Council's expectations and outcomes would be met.
5. The key agreements that govern the legal relationship between YMT and the Council are as follows:
  6. **The Memorandum of Association** describes the Trust, its reasons for existing and its charitable objects. It is based on a standard model and is intentionally broad in order to give the Trust all necessary powers to be able to function as an independent organisation.
  7. **The Articles of Association** prescribes how YMT operates as an organisation. With regard to the appointment of trustees, they state that in every notice for an annual general meeting, the Board shall set out its requirements for the skills, qualities and experience which it needs from its members. The notice shall state the extent to which those requirements are met by those Trustees continuing in office and those retiring and intending to re-offer themselves for election.
  8. In exercising their powers to nominate, appoint, reappoint, elect, re-elect, approve and dismiss Trustees, both the members and trustees shall seek to ensure that the Board of Trustees is representative of the local community and users of the services and facilities offered by the Company, and also comprises persons with a broad range of skills who are likely to contribute to the Company's success. The specific way that YMT would carry out its business was also covered in a Partnership Delivery Plan (PDP). In 2005 the PDP was updated. The current PDP (shown at Annex A) sets out what YMT and the Council have agreed will be delivered, the targets YMT will reach and the reporting arrangements.
  9. **The Funding Agreement** sets out how the Council funds the Trust.
  10. **The Transfer Agreement** formally transferred to YMT the activity of providing museum and gallery services together with the staff and the assets.
  11. **The Leases**- Separate leases were agreed in respect of the Art Gallery, the Castle Museum, St Mary's Castlegate Church, the Fulford Cross store and the Birch Park store. The term was originally for 25 years from 1 August, 2002 and the rent was a peppercorn. However, when the YMT applied for Heritage Lottery Funding the HLF insisted on a longer term of lease so members agreed 35 year leases. A licence was granted for the Darnborough Street store which was subsequently surrendered by YMT. YMT subsequently entered into a lease in its own right for the James Street store.

12. **The Collections Loan Agreement** provides for a loan period of 25 years and sets out the Trust's obligations. Although the leases were changed to 35 years, the collections loan agreement remained at 25 years. In reality this only really affects the Art Gallery collection because the Yorkshire Museum collection is part of the Yorkshire Museum and Gardens Charity and the Castle Museum collection is part of the Kirk Deed. A collections management protocol forms a schedule of the Funding Agreement and sets out how the collections are to be managed. YMT collects only on behalf of the Council. In 2005, YMT drafted an Acquisition and Disposal policy for 2005-6 which was meant to be replaced in 2006 with a more considered policy. As yet, this work has not been undertaken and the temporary policy remains in place.
13. **The Scheme for the Yorkshire Museum and Gardens Charity:** The Yorkshire Museum and Gardens were originally owned and operated by the Yorkshire Philosophical Society (YPS). In 1960 the YPS formed a charity, the Yorkshire Museum and Gardens Charity, vesting the assets to York City Council as sole trustee. The scheme governing the charity provided for the Council to administer the assets but gave the YPS a significant oversight role within the management arrangements. Trusteeship subsequently passed to North Yorkshire County Council. When it returned to City of York Council (CYC) in 1996, the Council attempted to fulfil the terms of the scheme through its newly formed, unified museums service. This caused significant tension with the YPS. It was clear that a new scheme was needed.
14. Once YMT was up and running a new scheme for the Yorkshire Museum and Gardens Charity became imperative. Unfortunately it took 7 years to negotiate this new scheme with the YPS and the Charity Commission during which time YMT had to operate the assets under a licence from CYC.
15. Under the new scheme the Yorkshire Museum and Gardens Charity forms part of York Museums Trust for the purposes of registration and accounting. This means that YMT only have to file a single set of accounts rather than a separate set for YMT and the Yorkshire Museum and Gardens Charity respectively.
16. **The Kirk Deed:** The Charity Commission required this be updated and therefore a revised version has been in place since 9 October 2009.

### **Background to Review**

17. In November 2011, this Committee received a topic assessment report for a scrutiny topic proposed by Councillor Watson, together with the background information above on the formation of the Trust and its performance.

18. In January 2012, the Committee received a further briefing paper providing information on the Trust's relationship with the council and the structures in place, and the original Executive report from July 2002 setting out the purpose of the Trust.
19. Based on the information provided at both those meetings, Members agreed it would not be appropriate to scrutinise the work of the Trust and their internal processes as suggested in Cllr Watson's topic registration form. However, having taken into account all the information, Members agreed to proceed with a scrutiny review based on the following remit:
- 'To determine whether YMT have achieved appropriate collections management standards in line with the Collections Loan Agreement and Collections Management Protocol agreed in 2002'.*
20. In March 2012, the Committee received information and a presentation from the Commercial Director at York Museums Trust which identified that:
- CYC is a custodian trustee and YMT is a managing trustee for most but not all of the collections. In the case of the Art Gallery collections they simply belong to CYC and are loaned to YMT.
  - There are over 1.5 million objects in the hugely varied collections
  - The different collections require different types of care. Some collections will naturally decay over time e.g. the biological collection. These require specialist care to delay their decay. Other collection types will retain their current condition if stored and displayed in an appropriate manner.
  - YMT have set themselves a number of priorities:
    - a. To store the collections in an appropriate environment and manner
    - b. To document each collection
    - c. To develop each collection

### **Information Gathered**

21. As part of this scrutiny review, the Committee agreed to look at YMT's progress in achieving the above priorities and the information gathered on each is shown in the following sections of this report:
- a) Storage – see paragraphs 22 - 51
  - b) Documentation – see paragraphs 52 - 67
  - c) Development – see paragraphs 68 - 90

## **a) Storage**

22. The Committee agreed a Task Group of Cllr Watson, Cllr Fitzpatrick and Cllr Taylor to carry out a visit to view the storage facilities at the Castle Museum, Yorkshire Museum and Art Gallery, and at YMT's four external sites, in order to assess the conditions in which the collections were being kept.
23. In 2002, the storage facilities required urgent attention due to the poor conditions many of the collections were being stored in on-site. Many have subsequently been re-homed in modern storage facilities at external sites around the city.
24. On 18 April 2012, the Task Group were given a tour of the storage facilities at the Castle Museum, Art Gallery and Yorkshire Museum by the Head of Collections Management who has been in post for the past seven years and has seen the improvements put in place by YMT during that time.
25. Castle Museum  
The Task Group was shown the numerous collections stored on-site:
  - Decorative Arts – stored in built-in locked wooden cupboards along a staff corridor (some tissue wrapped for additional protection), with larger pieces stored on high shelves above the cupboards covered in cloth.
  - Special Ceramics - stored in a locked room off a public corridor. Within the room, items are stored in locked modern storage cupboards with Perspex in the doors. These cupboards were fairly expensive but ideal for purpose as the contents can be easily identified without the need to unlock/open the cupboards. Other large and unusually shaped items e.g. decorative glass walking canes were laid on cloth covered table tops, and other smaller items were stored in coded boxes.
  - Military (Uniforms, Accessories & Weapons) – stored in number of adjoining rooms, accessed via a locked door off a public corridor. Room 1 containing swords and sabres stored on purpose built racks. Room 2 contained military uniforms hung from rails (Crimean war through to World War II). Room 3 was a box store for accessories (boxes coded to assist in identification of contents). Room 4, accessed via a locked metal door marked 'Explosives' behind which was a locked metal gate, contained handguns, muskets, machine guns, cannon balls etc. The handguns were laid in wooden drawer units and the larger firearms stored on racks.

- Scientific instruments - the Task Group was shown where a mezzanine level above a staff corridor behind Kirkgate had previously existed, on which the collection had been stored. The only access to the storage space had been via a pull-down ladder which was far from ideal. However the collection had recently been moved to allow the mezzanine level to be removed and the staff corridor to be re-designed to become a new back alley display as part of the Kirkgate exhibition.

26. Members acknowledged the serious logistical exercise to move the collections in and out of storage based on the programme of planned exhibitions. They recognised the difficulties of carrying out that process, particularly before the introduction of purpose built external storage facilities when more had been stored at the museum in cramped conditions.

## 27. Art Gallery

As part of their tour of the Art Gallery's storage facilities, the Task Group received information on YMT's forthcoming reconfiguration of the Art Gallery which had been planned in order to address some of the building's limitations. For example:

- The picture store - the room contained over 1000 easel paintings stored in racks based on theme and size, with protective rubber sheeting between frames. The room also contained packing crates used to transport pieces borrowed by the Art Gallery or lent out. The Task Group learnt that pictures have continued to be stored in that room even though it is not ideal, due to the huge air handling units in situ. YMT acknowledged that although that provided a suitable environment in regard to temperature and humidity, it was not ideal due to the possibility of water damage to the art work should the machinery break. The Task Group was informed that the opportunity to improve the current situation would come as part of the planned re-configuration of the art gallery when the machinery is due to be repositioned on the roof of the building. The plan also includes the installation of a new racking system to allow better access to the easel paintings.
- Upstairs store room - containing 15,000+ works on paper stored in 252 boxes, together with a wall full of book shelves for reference books etc. A lot of the works on paper being stored are topographical by both local and nationally known artists. The contents of each box are stored based on subject e.g. Bootham Bar and the individual pieces are separated by tissue paper. Individual pieces are put on display to complement the exhibited themes on display in the Art Gallery.
- Studio Ceramics - the Task Group learnt that YMT holds the best collection of studio ceramics outside of the V&A, but they do not

currently have enough space in the museums to display it all. As part of the Art Gallery re-configuration, the plan is to have a large room on the first floor where the whole Decorative Arts collection can be displayed together.

- Social History store - also due to be improved as part of the Art Gallery re-configuration.

## 28. Yorkshire Museum

The Task Group visited two store rooms in the basement accessed via a staff only area:

- Geology Room - containing racking for large pieces and wooden cabinets / drawer units containing small more fragile pieces, protected by foam surrounds.
- Archaeology Room – containing metal shelving units used to store mostly geology pieces now. Items stored in boxes and wooden drawer units.

29. Both rooms were monitored for temperature and humidity with a Curators work area between the two rooms which had previously also been used for storage before the transfer of some of the archaeological collection to the external storage facility at Birch Park.

30. The Task Group were also informed of a High Security Room where Bronze and Iron Age jewels and coins were stored.

31. The Task Group noted there was no sprinkler system fitted at the Art Gallery due to the damage water would cause to the art work on display and in storage. Instead there were fire extinguishers positioned around the building which if needed, would be used with extreme care in order to prevent/limit damage to the art work where ever possible.

32. Many of the items held by YMT are referenced in national research which helps build up their worth and the Museums' standing within the Museum world. The Task Group were informed that it is common practice within the museum world not to take out insurance for collections held by the owning museum, basically because most items would be considered priceless as they could not be replaced if damaged/ruined. However, it is common practice for Museums to insure pieces they are borrowing from others in case they are damaged whilst in their possession or in transit. There is also Government indemnity for borrowed items although national security standards must be met to receive that indemnity.

### 33. External Storage Facilities

On 24 April 2012, the Task Group toured the four external storage sites used by YMT. They were informed that all the items moved from the Museums out into external storage, had been documented first. They also noted that:

- a) The buildings at each of the external sites were alarmed and there was no signage to indicate their ownership and/or what they are being used to store.
- b) YMT employed a collections cleaner who regularly visited all of the external sites to carry out housekeeping to prevent/delay deterioration of the stored items (hoovering and dusting at both Birch Park and James Street and sweeping pathways clear at the other sites).
- c) YMT staff regularly checked for signs of infestation - special care was taken to identify wood worm etc so that it could be treated. Pest traps were set and the presence of beetles and moths was monitored. Also, YMT fumigated and/or froze items where appropriate, before putting them in storage.

### 34. James Street External Storage Site

Built in the late 1980s, James Street is the main repository of the Castle Museum, and considered by YMT to be a well performing store. It provided a nice environment (no damp and some heating) to store pieces from the social history collections previously stored at the Castle Museum. The main storage space contained a mezzanine level to make the most of the space within the unit. Items were organised and stored in social history categories e.g. personal life, work life etc. There was a hanging store for costumes and textiles and some were stored in large boxes stacked on shelves. There were also some bicycles and many pieces of furniture, some of which appeared to be in a state unsuitable for display e.g. a chaise longue with ripped upholstery.

### 35. Riccall Grange External Storage Site

There were 4 purpose built storage units occupied by YMT at Riccall Grange. The facilities were used by YMT as a deep storage facility for items unlikely to be put on display, for large items which had previously been stored elsewhere, and for bulky archaeological items etc.

36. The units were big and the conditions good. The first two units had background heating to prevent frost, and was partly racked out with steel shelving. They were being used to store finer large pieces from the Castle Museum e.g.:

- A Butchers Wagon (Cross Purveyors) donated by Cross family who have the butchers shop in the Market.



- A steam fire engine and a number of fire tenders
- A number of marble fire surrounds
- A selection of hand tools
- An old motor vehicle
- A 1897 steam car
- The world famous traditional gypsy caravan which used to be on display in the 1960s gallery at the Castle Museum and has now been in storage for 3yrs



- A large printing press and pieces of old shop fittings and internal fittings from a bank, left over from fitting out Kirkgate, in the Castle Museum

37. Most of the items were covered to keep them as dust free as possible. They have an issue with cluster flies at the site due to its countryside location, but thankfully they don't eat into things, but it does result in a lot of dead flies.



38. The other two units had no heating and had been fitted out with 6m high racking. The units contained items from the Yorkshire Museum and the hutments (behind the Art Gallery) e.g.:

- A number of sarcophagi
- A roman oven
- Large pieces of stone from St Marys Abbey
- A gravestone for a local Major's horse



39. Some of the items weighed 1-2 tonnes and needed placing in situ by forklift.

40. The Task group noted there was room to store much more out at Riccall Grange, and were pleased to hear that YMT planned to move more items out there from Birch Park to enable better use of that more centrally located storage site.

#### 41. Birch Park External Storage Site

Built in the late 1980s, Birch Park was being used to store items from the Yorkshire Museum's archaeological and natural science collections. The natural science pieces were stored in large walk-in wooden boxes. The individual items were either boxed or in small display cases, stored on roller racking e.g.:

- Dinosaur bones
- Bird skeletons
- Butterflies & shells
- Stuffed animals
- Remains of extinct species

42. Above the wooden boxes on a mezzanine level, the Task Group were shown a large storage area with racking containing large pieces of stone. The weight of the stone was an issue and so YMT had already shipped some of the larger pieces out to Riccall Grange. All of the stone except for around 200 North Yorkshire pieces had come from buildings / sites across the city e.g.:



- St Mary's Abbey
- A roman archway
- The Minster

43. The Task Group learnt that work was continuing to sort the items and to move some of the less impressive pieces out to Riccall Grange. YMT felt this would provide them with sufficient space to reconstruct some of the building parts e.g. the roman archway, so that they were available to view and more accessible to researchers etc.

44. There was also shelving for Roman, Medieval and Saxon pottery e.g. bowls, jars, urns etc.



44. And drawer units containing Neolithic pieces e.g. hand axes, inlaid in to foam surrounds for their protection.



45. Elsewhere in the unit on the first floor, there was a large room containing the remaining pieces of the Gordon Baldwin collection (currently being exhibited at the Art Gallery), together with other large ceramic pieces.



46. At the time of the visit, there were also a significant number of boxes containing pieces waiting to be recorded.



47. On the ground floor, there were a number of smaller rooms containing pieces from the Decorative Arts Collection stored in metal cupboards with Perspex doors to enable easy viewing of the contents. The pieces had all been documented and the shelves were labelled.

48. Fulford Cross External Storage Site

The Council bought the site in the 1970s with the intention of extending the Castle Museum experience by shipping visitors down the river to the site to visit an outdoor venue where large pieces could be put on display. This idea never came to fruition, but the Council retained the site for use as an external store. The Task Group found the building to be run down. Made of asbestos-like material with a corrugated roof, the Task Group were informed that the roof and building were not waterproof, and that rain runs down the slope of the land leading to the building and under the door. For that reason stored items have tended to be sat on pallets to provide some protection from the water. To date, the building has never been affected by the river flooding.

49. Before their visit, the Task Group was informed that the store was only used to keep robust pieces such as agricultural equipment and other large/ industrial pieces.



50. However on inspection, the Task Group was surprised at some of the contents stored there. For example:

- Shop fittings
- A triumph car



- Wooden furniture
- 3-piece suite
- A wheelchair & Perambulator

- A Hearse
- Ornate railings & lampposts



- A collection of bicycles
- A number of handcarts & horse-drawn carts

51. Although there were two walk-in wooden boxes providing some protection from the elements for a minimal number of small items, the Task Group noted that most of the items in store at Fulford Cross were unprotected and nothing had been done to delay their further decay.



## **b) Documentation**

52. At the meeting in March 2012, YMT's Commercial Director provided information on the Documentation Plan. The Committee noted that the plan contained an official estimate of 170yrs to carry out full documentation of the collections. Also that YMT set annual targets to progress this work.
53. During their tours, the Task Group learnt that the fine art collection and most of the archaeology and science collections were now documented. However, the Social History collection which is so large and varied remained a challenge. The Task Group queried the progress made across all collections and as a result received information on the level of documentation carried out across all the Castle Museum's Collections – see Annex C. In regard to the Art Gallery, YMT's first five year plan for 2005-2010 saw retrospective documentation there almost completed, and the documentation software (Adlib) improved and updated. YMT now have a couple of years of focussed project work with the developments at the Art Gallery and Castle Museum. The Task Group did not receive any information on the level of documentation for the collections held by the Yorkshire Museum.
54. YMT intends to submit another 5 year plan when they re-apply for Accreditation in spring 2014 (see paragraphs 91 - 98 below for further information on Accreditation). This will include plans for completing the documenting of the Social History collection.

55. On their visit to the Castle Museum, the Task Group learnt that cataloguing is not necessarily done by collection - sometimes it is project based. For example, in the case of the Decorative Arts collection, the content of each store cupboard is recorded. As and when individual items are taken from the cupboards for use in specific displays e.g. wine glasses on a dining table setting in a Victorian room, YMT catalogue everything used in the display. Over time through this approach, the cataloguing of a collection grows. If items are missing from the cupboard the next time the contents are checked, they are marked down as not present on that specific date. Cataloguing is checked against previous records and auditors make random checks. This method of cataloguing and recording is commonplace within the Museum world.
56. The Task Group were reassured to learn that in November 2011, Veritau (internal audit service) looked at the issues around documenting the collections and gave substantial assurance that the right controls and working methods etc were in place, and were good. However, when the Task Group considered the Veritau report in detail (see Annex D), they noted that Veritau's testing was limited due to lack of access (page 3 para 2.1). As the Task Group had also had issues around gaining access they expressed concern about the thoroughness of the audit, and queried Veritau's overall opinion that the controls within the system provided substantial assurance (page 2 para 1.3)
57. In September 2012, the Task Group met with the report author from Veritau. They asked for clarification on Veritau's role as auditor for YMT recognising it would be different from that of auditor for the Council. Veritau confirmed that YMT was an external client whose work they had to tender for. However, they are no longer YMT's auditors as their contract came to an end in April 2012. During the time they held the contract, Veritau met annually with YMT to identify high risk areas and then went on to look at the appropriate systems and controls in place to help manage the identified risks.
58. In regard to the Audit, Veritau confirmed that its focus audit was to check the integrity of the records on Adlib. Initially they spoke with the Curators to get their perception on the issues and then decided what they would look at in detail. Veritau explained it was standard practice to sample rather than audit a whole collection. They chose a sample of items from stores and collections and looked at them on Adlib and vice versa. They confirmed that only a few anomalies were found and only a very low percentage of items remained unfound. When asked, Veritau could not say what percentage of collection items were on Adlib or on other systems.

59. The Task Group raised concerns around the decision not to visit all sites (see paragraph 2.1 of Audit report) as they recognised during their own visits that each of the stores worked in a different way, and therefore unless each was sampled it would not be possible to form an overall picture. Veritau clarified they were not refused access; rather that a decision was taken to focus on higher value and higher risk items which happened to be stored elsewhere. As a result, a majority of their sampling was carried out at the James Street store. They did not visit any of the other external stores, and their audit did not include sampling of the Archaeology collection at external storage site B. They acknowledged their final report was not explicit about the areas not covered by the audit, even though they felt their report made clear which areas were looked at.
60. Veritau confirmed that YMT initially raised concerns about the accuracy and consistency of their record keeping. However, as Veritau carried out sampling across the archaeology, history and art collections they were able to allay YMT's concerns. And, although they identified some minor errors, they found no significant weaknesses and felt the systems did not need a major overhaul. They therefore confirmed that in their view, their original judgement of 'Substantial assurance' was justified.
61. The Task Group agreed that at face value the audit results appeared to be very good. However, having met with Veritau and considered the audit report in detail, the Task Group concluded that the audit was insufficiently rigorous to evidence YMT's appropriate documentation of the collections, bearing in mind it's narrow remit, the fact that not all collections are on Adlib, not all collections were sampled, not all sites were visited, and that its aim was to 'support rather than challenge'.
62. Use of Volunteers for Documenting the Collections  
The Task Group learnt that all the curators are involved in documenting the collections, and previously some of the collections assistants have been. YMT's aim is to make all the existing data available to the public and allow digital access, and funding has been sourced to make this happen.
63. In September 2012, the Task Group met with the Trust's Volunteer Manager. She provided information on YMT's volunteers' programme initiated at the end of 2006 (800 volunteers since that time). Initially the Volunteer Manager started with 14 volunteers and worked part-time moving to full-time 3 years ago. She was solely responsible for the marketing and development of the volunteer programme, recruitment, induction and volunteer support and therefore the number of volunteers was limited to 200 at any one time based on her capacity. However, in June 2012 following receipt of some Arts Council funding, YMT recruited



a full-time co-ordinator which in turn has allowed YMT to take a more pro-active approach to recruiting volunteers.

64. The Task Group was informed that as York is quite an active and affluent city, it does not have the normal museum volunteer demographic. 60% are under 40; often volunteering to gain skills and experience or to improve their CV, or perhaps to find a way into museum work. A majority are sourced via YMT's website. Universities send placements, which tend to stay for a year and in addition YMT market to groups e.g. Probus Club. YMT are also keen to increase their number of older volunteers (50+). The Task Group recognised that Councillors may be able to help facilitate the recruitment of more volunteers, perhaps through the Volunteer Manager attending future ward meetings/community events.
65. Recruitment tends to be aimed at supporting specific projects - there are around 30 different volunteer projects in a year. Lots of roles don't require specific experience they just need to be keen and willing, and to have people skills. Others work with specific teams carrying out condition cataloguing and low level conservation work e.g. archaeology, natural science, social history. YMT also seek out specific groups with particular skills e.g. the National Association of Decorative Arts Association. There are currently 250 active volunteers across all sites - 30 are long serving volunteers who have done 7 years or more, 140 are visitor facing. Placements for 15/16 yr olds are also offered through schools, and at Birch Park, students and volunteers are helping to record, photograph and repack collection pieces. The observatory is fully operated by volunteers and the Studio programme at Castle Museum is mainly run by volunteers. The aim is to have 400 volunteers by 2015 but this will be dependant on the staffing structure capacity to provide the necessary support.
66. During the tour of the stores, the Task Group were told that YMT planned to use volunteers to progress the work of documenting the collections. However, it became clear that the programme of training had yet to be defined, and recruitment had not yet begun. The Task Group queried when this specific recruitment would start, what skills would be required, and from where YMT expected to source suitable volunteers.
67. The Volunteer Manager confirmed it has always been YMT's ambition to have a team of volunteers focussing on retrospective documentation, but this has been delayed due to a lack of resources. However, the Volunteer Manager confirmed it is happening on a small scale as part of specific project work e.g. those involved with the social history team are condition checking and recording. As and when it formally starts, the volunteers will receive basic object handling training (as delivered to all new volunteers) and training on the Adlib Database from the Registrar.

They will also receive individual training specific to the collection they are to document, from the curators responsible for overseeing their work i.e. what would be expected of them, what terms to use, what to record, how to access the collections and handle them safely, and what to do if they noticed a deterioration in the condition of the objects or if they needed packing differently.

### **c) Development of the Collections**

68. Throughout their tours, the Task Group learnt how the various collections have continued to grow through donations and YMT purchases. Also, that each collection has a specific collecting policy. For example:

- The firearms collection has been added to through gun amnesties. Police advise Museums of the weapons handed in, and Museums can then request specific pieces to add to their collection.
- Bequests from local families - In some cases a particularly fine piece of furniture will be bequeathed by a family to the Museum together with a number of other pieces. In the past, it has been common practice for YMT to accept a bequest in total, in order to attain the fine piece but this has left them with the problem of storing the rest. Over time, this has contributed to the storage problems outlined in paragraphs 34 & 49 above, and paragraphs 73-76 below.
- When an old (traditionally fitted out) shop has closed down, the museum has taken the opportunity where appropriate to acquire stock and the shop fittings for future use within the Kirkgate display at the Castle Museum. The shoe shop display in Kirkgate was created in this way. However, the storage of such items prior to them being brought back into use remains an issue, as detailed in the analysis section below.
- Excavations in and around the city also add to the collections. For example, the Hungate excavation is expected to provide a number of items which if suitable, may be added to the archaeological collections.

### 69. Education

During their tours, the Task Group received information on the educational provision provided by YMT at Birch Park and of their plans to provide more opportunities for visitors to access Birch Park. Currently researchers can visit the store and YMT are involved in a joint piece of work with English Heritage. However, YMT would like to increase their offer to schools and local history groups so that they can visit the store to view and learn about the collections. This would become easier to facilitate once more items have been documented and moved. YMT

make no charge for the viewing of items in storage for educational purposes

70. Staffing Restructure

As one of the Arts Council major partners, YMT received 1.5m from the Arts Council to replace the Renaissance funding they previously received. The Arts Council associated different priorities with that funding which resulted in the need for a staffing restructure.

71. The new structure will still include a Head Curator, Curators and Assistant Curators as before, who all have specific qualifications relevant to the collections they manage i.e. professional and academic skills are matched against the collections (e.g. the Head Curator is a qualified archaeologist). In addition, the restructure will see the introduction of a Data Control Officer and a number of Collection Facilitators. The Facilitators will have a lower level of professional skills e.g. customer skills/interest in social history, and will be at graduate level or have experience of museums. This approach is indicative of a national move to making museum collections more accessible and exciting, and their role will be a huge benefit to YMT as they will increase the amount of contact the organisation has with the public.

72. Having visited the museums and seen the work of the curators, guides and volunteers, the Task Group recognised the importance of information and knowledge being passed on from staff leaving the employ of the Trust, to ensure the quality of the customer experience.

73. Limited Free Storage Space

The Task Group recognised there was little available storage space at the Museums, Art Gallery, Birch Park, James Street and Fulford Cross. They therefore queried whether there had previously been other storage sites used by YMT which had since been disposed of either by themselves or the Council, and the reasons for their disposal.

74. They learnt of several other stores that had come to YMT when it was formed, which had subsequently been deemed unsuitable for use. These were:

- An old maltings building on Darnbrough Street - used to store material very much like that at Fulford. It had only ever been a temporary store (taken on originally by the Castle Museum) and was let to YMT on a short-term licence. The building was in a very poor and unsecure state with birds getting in, and so YMT decided to clear it. Some of the objects at Fulford came from Darnbrough Street at that time. The Council covered YMT's removal costs when

it was vacated during 2006/7 because the then Housing Department required its return.

- A couple of storage containers – They were cleared at the same time as Darnbrough Street with the collections moving to James Street. Those units were expensive to rent and impractical as YMT had to pay a fee each time they wanted to access to the contents.
- Marygate Annexe - This was cleared of archaeology objects at the end of 2011. The building was in a very poor state (repeated acts of vandalism and unauthorised access) and the collections and staff that looked after them were both deemed at risk.
- St Marys lodge – Used to store the biology boxes now stored at Birch Park. The basement rooms where the boxes had been stored were very damp and the conditions were unsuitable for the type of material, especially over winter. Access for staff and researchers was also very limited.

75. Poor Storage Conditions at Fulford Cross

The Task Group noted that Fulford Cross is the last of the inherited stores for YMT to tackle. Based on what they saw at Fulford Cross, the Task Group agreed that in their view the items stored there would definitely have decayed less quickly had they been stored elsewhere. Or, if the same level of care had been applied as they had witnessed at the other storage sites e.g. bubble wrapping, protection from the weather, temperature controlled etc. For example, they learnt that some internal wooden shop fittings recently placed in storage at Fulford Cross had been brought back out and reconfigured for use in the newly extended Kirkgate exhibition. The Task Group believe this would not have been possible had those fittings been in storage at Fulford Cross for any length of time, due to the adverse effects of the poor conditions.

76. In September 2012 when the Task Group met with YMT representatives, the Task Group questioned the decision making process for deciding which items should be stored at Fulford Cross and therefore left in its minimally protective environment. They also expressed their concern that in their view, a majority of the items at Fulford Cross were now unfit for future displays e.g. the vehicles, carts, bicycles, pieces of wooden furniture, a 3-piece suite etc.

77. The Head Curator agreed that Fulford Cross is in poor condition, congested and unkempt, and confirmed that when he first took up his post in 2004, it was physically impossible to get into a number of the stores to access the collections. For the first two years his time was spent tidying up and documenting. He agreed that some items in Fulford

should be on display or moved to another store, but confirmed that the issues at Fulford Cross would be addressed as part of a planned wholesale transfer of stored items to the appropriate external stores. This work is scheduled to start in 2013 and the necessary funding has been sourced. It will involve carrying out significant assessments which are expensive in terms of staffing etc. It will also require forklift drivers etc and the use of Lorries - it is possible to move 26 pallets in one lorry but it is time consuming loading and unloading so it is only possible to move two loads a day. It is expected the work to complete this wholesale movement of collection items will be completed by April 2014.

78. YMT also informed the Task Group that:

- two applications to the Heritage Lottery Fund had been made between 2005-2007 for large scale storage projects which would have enabled the building of another unit on the land around Birch Park, thereby doubling their storage allowing the collections stores at the museum sites to be cleared and their other off site stores to be rationalised. Unfortunately, both bids were unsuccessful, delaying completion of this work. YMT acknowledge it is usually difficult or near impossible to get grant aid for storage projects so they have had to take the approach of funding solutions themselves, which has meant they have had to phase developments and make them on a scale they can afford to finance, rather than going for one big fix.
- As part of the forthcoming 1914-1918 project at the Castle Museum, YMT will be seeking alternative off site storage for the other collections to open up the top floor and this is likely to be another rented unit.
- Improvements to the storage of the Fine and Decorative Arts collection at the Art Gallery will be achieved as part of the planned redevelopment of the site in 2013-2015. YMT have included a rationalisation plan for assessing and reducing the amount of bulk archaeology in store in their forward plan for 2013-2018 which will relieve pressure on Birch Park and create space to allow them to take in material currently with YAT.

79. Overall The Task group agreed that in their view, there were many items stored at the various external storage sites that were unlikely to ever go out on display due to their poor condition e.g. at James Street the Task Group saw a chaise longue with ripped upholstery. YMT confirmed they would not choose to repair such an item as the use of the materials available today, would de-value it and make it unsuitable for display. The Task Group recognised that at some point YMT would need to decide whether such items should remain in storage or be disposed of.

80. The Task Group therefore suggested that consideration should be given to disposing of many of the items at Fulford Cross and some of those at James Street, because they were now unfit for display (technically referred to as 'de-accessioning'). This would free up space to allow the remaining items to be better protected and stored at Fulford Cross, and make the process of cataloguing the collections easier. In response, the Head Curator highlighted that people have expectations that what they donate will be retained so there is an agreed process to go through when considering disposal.
81. De-accessioning Collection Items  
The Task Group learnt of the national guidelines for de-accessioning which YMT follow i.e. a Curator suggests a suitable item for de-accessioning which is considered by the full team of curators. If they agree, they make a proposal to the YMT Directors, who in turn if they agree, propose items for de-accessioning to the Trustees. YMT confirmed that the final stage is to seek the council's approval. To facilitate the whole process YMT use a disposal request form which the curator with the specific knowledge of the collection completes for each suggested disposal, and which form the basis of discussion at the team meetings. These are used as the formal record of the reasons for disposal and are signed off at the meeting and form the record of the decision to pass the disposal forward. There are some rare exceptions where consent may be obtained retrospectively i.e. if an item is dangerous e.g. gunpowder, or if an item is moth ridden or a risk to other parts of the collection. When a decision is taken to dispose of an item, YMT always photograph and record the item first.
82. The Task Group checked with the Assistant Director for Communities, Culture and Public Realm as to the Council's role in the de-accessioning process and found a discrepancy. They learnt that in the Council's view, they were being notified of a disposal rather than receiving a request to agree to the disposal of an item. Furthermore, it was confirmed that there have been very few notifications received. The Task Group also learnt that the council does not keep a separate record of disposed items.
83. In recognising that the disposal of unwanted/duplicate/ damaged items was crucial to free up space within YMT's storage facilities - thereby allowing documentation work to be progressed more quickly and the collections to be further developed, the Task Group wanted to gauge whether YMT are pro-actively disposing of items. They therefore requested information on any items that had been through the de-accessioning process outlined in paragraph 81 above and learnt that 279 items had been disposed of since 2003 (see Annex E attached). Some

of the items disposed of from Darnbrough Street had been sold to White House Antiques, others to L Clancey and Sons. The remaining objects went either to other museums or for Local Authority disposal -effectively skipped.

84. In addition, the Task Group learnt of a number of items currently in the process of being de-accessioned i.e. approved for disposal but which at end of July 2012 were still partway through the process and had not yet left their possession— see Annex F. The Task Group noted the time taken for each item to go through the de-accession process and queried why it took so long.
85. YMT acknowledged it is a lengthy process. Once approval has been obtained from the Trustees and the Council YMT have to advertise for a couple of months (in the Museums Journal). There may need to be a process of negotiation e.g. visits from other museums and it takes time to arrange suitable transportation of items. There is always a need to evaluate from an academic point of view, and to have the right checks and balances in place. There is also a level of risk associated with disposing of items too quickly. For example, a decision was taken to dispose of some bird bones – the significance of which was not originally recognised. It transpired that the bones were the only known set of bones for a now extinct bird. Fortunately this was discovered before the bones were disposed of. Museum developments or new exhibitions can also be a factor e.g. the recent development of Kirkgate meant that some items that were to be disposed of, were put back into use (see paragraph 75).
86. The Task Group identified another discrepancy when they compared the dates of the disposals shown in Annex C (which included two items disposed of during 2010), against the Draft Statement of Accounts presented to the Audit & Governance Committee in July 2012, (which stated there had been no disposals of heritage assets in 2010/11 or 2011/12). The Task Group expressed concern as to the accuracy of the information being provided in the Statement of Accounts, and attributed the error in reporting to the Council not keeping a separate record of disposals.
87. Bearing in mind that the Museum Collections are considered as part of the Council's heritage assets, the Task Group concluded that the Council's role in the de-accessioning process should be clarified, and should include giving final sign off to the disposal of an item and keeping a separate record of items signed off, for audit purposes. In addition, YMT should provide a list of all disposals as part of their bi-annual performance reporting to Overview & Scrutiny.

88. The Task Group also noted that the current Acquisition and Disposal policy drafted by YMT in 2005 was only created for use on a temporary basis until such time as a more considered policy could be produced (as referred to in paragraph 12 above). In acknowledging that this piece of work is long overdue, YMT indicated they would not be able to resource undertaking this policy review work until autumn 2012.
89. Taking all the above issues into account, the Task Group agreed that the ability to develop the collections was not only about sourcing suitable items, but was subject to a number of other key factors i.e. having sufficient (and suitable) storage facilities and exhibition space, having the right staffing structure in place and sufficient volunteers to allow the public full access to the collections.
90. The Task Group were please to conclude that YMT had made improvements in all these areas to enable this to happen, even taking into account the issues identified by this review.

### **Accreditation**

91. Accreditation is a national scheme now administered by the Arts Council which looks at the way museums and galleries are run and the standard of the activities they do (how they look after their collections, the learning provision and the services they offer visitors).
92. The Task Group considered the Accreditation standard which sets out what is expected of an accredited museum in all categories considered, together with Guidance on Accreditation in regard to collections, which YMT will follow for their next round of applications in spring 2014 – see Annexes G & H.
93. The Task Group looked at the submission findings from the two times YMT had sought Accreditation since the Trust was formed, and noted that the only feedback received in response to YMT's first application made in summer 2005, was a letter dated 20 Sept 2005 commending them on the quality of their application, and a note to keep MLA (who were administering the scheme at the time) informed of progress towards:
  - a new 35 year lease from the City of York Council;
  - developing a programme to recruit volunteers and;
  - progress on retrospective documentation
94. In noting that the new lease had subsequently been received, The Task Group agreed the other issues had only been partly achieved.



95. In regard to YMT's second return made in summer 2009 which provided an update on the information in the original 2005 application, YMT confirmed that at the time it was submitted, a new accreditation standard was in preparation which was subsequently delayed as a result of the demise of MLA and the switch of roles to ACE. YMT also confirmed they received no feedback on their 2009 update and believe their submission was simply logged by MLA due to the fact that MLA were effectively preparing to be wound up.
96. In September 2012 when the Task Group met with YMT representatives, they queried YMT's applications for accreditation. They learnt that there are 5000 museums in the country - 1800 of those are accredited (some museums chose not to go for accreditation as it's a very high standard to attain). The accreditation application is a very rigorous process. The form is very long and each application has to have a lot of supporting documents. They also learnt that accreditation is needed for many funding streams. Arts Council funding is match funded, and funding will not be granted if it is not a viable business.
97. At the time YMT took over, neither of the Museums or the Art Gallery were operating at the standard required for Accreditation so there was considerable work to be done during 2002-2005 to put the standards and procedures in place before the first application for Accreditation was made in summer 2005. YMT worked with a regional officer (someone who had worked in museums for 20 years). He acted as a mentor and he interrogated YMT against the required standards. He also represented YMT at the accreditation panel and was questioned on their behalf. The Arts Council look at the quality of the visitor experience and the facilities, whether the staff was well-trained, if they were used to dealing with people with particular needs and if the operation was running safely. Specifically in terms of collections management, Accreditation means YMT had to have certain policies and procedures in place and their curators needed to be working to the same standards as all accredited museums across the country.
98. YMT was assessed as a major partner. They were assessed as outstanding in 3 of the 5 categories and designated as good in the other two. YMT have remained fully accredited since that time and have continued to meet those standards in the two reviews held since the Trust was formed. They have to submit bi-annual returns, and if they apply for a loan or make changes to the buildings they are inspected by a major partner regional officer. In addition, every other year they have to provide an update on any significant developments e.g. exhibitions, disasters or funding issues.
99. Responding to the Remit for the Review

Finally, in order to consider whether YMT have achieved appropriate collections management standards in line with the Collections Loan Agreement and Collections Management Protocol agreed in 2002 (in line with the remit for the review), and bearing in mind that it has been 10 years since the Agreement and Protocol was agreed, the Task Group felt it would be useful to know what (if any) factors YMT believed had during that time limited their progress in achieving the collections management standards detailed in the Agreement and Protocol, and/or achieving their priorities listed at paragraph 20 above. YMT named two issues in response - a) Storage and b) Retrospective Documentation.

## **Review Conclusions**

100. As a result of their review, the Task Group concluded that:

- The Veritau audit was insufficiently rigorous in its remit to evidence YMT's appropriate documentation of the collections as a whole (see paragraphs 56-61)
- The disposal of unsuitable/damaged items was just as important as the retaining of items and the development of the collections.
- The knock on effect of not disposing of unwanted/ duplicate and damaged items and the lack of available storage space had contributed to delaying the progression of work on the collections and to the implementation of YMT's plans for the future.
- The Council's role in the de-accessioning process needs to be clarified. It should continue to include the Council's right to veto the disposal of an item and the Council should keep a separate record of items signed off, for audit purposes.
- The Acquisition and Disposal policy needs updating as a matter of urgency (see paragraph 88 above), given that it was supposed to have been rewritten in 2006. And, it should be presented to the appropriate Cabinet Member for approval.
- YMT should provide a list of all disposals as part of their bi-annual performance reporting to Overview & Scrutiny. The format and content of those reports should also be amended to provide an update specifically focussed on YMT's progress against the Collections Loan Agreement and Collections Management Protocol agreed in 2002.
- Councillors could help to facilitate the recruitment of volunteers for YMT.

- It is important that knowledge of the collections is passed on from staff leaving the employ of the Trust to ensure the customer experience remains at a high standard
- Achieving Accreditation as a major partner was a considerable achievement by YMT, bearing in mind the Trust took over three very different institutions whose practises in collections management varied considerably. The Task Group agreed this was a good indication that YMT are achieving appropriate collections management standards.

## **Recommendations**

101. In order to achieve the appropriate collections management standards (in line with the Collections Loan Agreement and Collections Management Protocol agreed in 2002), the Task Group suggests that the Learning & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet that:

- i) YMT be requested to provide as a matter of urgency, a presentation to this Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the key principles that their Acquisition and Disposal policy review will be based on - In order to help frame and support YMT's work on those revisions
- ii) YMT provide a revised version of the Acquisition and Disposal policy for this Overview & Scrutiny Committee's consideration in early 2013.
- iii) To help facilitate the recruitment of additional volunteers, the Cabinet Member for Leisure & Culture encourages all Councillors to invite YMT's Volunteers Manager to attend a future ward meeting or community event, and identify ward residents who may have the appropriate skills.
- iv) As a means of enhancing their training, a mechanism should be put in place for disseminating information to new guides and volunteers from experienced employees leaving the Trust.
- v) They support appropriate revisions to the YMT Service Level Agreement to ensure YMT prioritise their work on de-accessioning unwanted/ damaged/duplicate collection items, in order to allow the progression of work on the collections and the implementation of YMT's plans for the future.

- vi) The request that YMT revise their future bi-annual update reports to Overview & Scrutiny, to ensure they:
  - a) identify their progress against the Collections Loan Agreement and Collections Management Protocol agreed in 2002;
  - b) include information on any items disposed of since the last update report.

**Council Plan 2011-15**

102. The success of the Trust and its business plan contributes to the council's priority to create jobs and grow the economy, through its investment in the tourism infrastructure. It also provides opportunities for learning, for young people across the city.

**Risk Management**

103. The recommendations arising from the review will help to reduce the risk of the cataloguing of the collections not being completed in line with the Partnership Delivery Plan, and will assist YMT in achieving the appropriate collections management standards (in line with the Collections Loan Agreement and Collections Management Protocol agreed in 2002).

**Implications Associated with Above Recommendations**

104. Implication information will be sought and added to this section of the final report once the Learning & Culture Scrutiny Committee has agreed the recommendations they wish to propose to the Cabinet.

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**Report Approved**



**Date** 31 May 2012

**Wards Affected:**

**All**



For further information please contact the author of the report

**Background Papers:**

Topic Assessment Report dated 7 December 2011  
 Executive Report July 2002

**Annexes:**

**Annex A** – Current Partnership Delivery Plan 2008-13

**Annex B** – Acquisition and Disposal Policy 2005

**Annex C** – Information on the level of documentation carried out across all the Castle Museum's Collections

**Annex D** – Veritau Report Dated March 2012

**Annex E** – Record of Disposals Made by YMT Since 2003

**Annex F** – List of Items Currently in the process of being De-accessioned

**Annex G** – Accreditation Standard

**Annex H** – Arts Council Guidance on Accreditation