



the essence

Summary of Strategic Plan 2004-7



west midlands
the regional council
for museums libraries
and archives

This document is a brief synopsis of our Strategic and Operational Plan for 2004–7.

It describes the aspirations that we share with our sector and the initiatives that we will undertake to assist in the modernisation and development of museums, libraries and archives for the people of the West Midlands, their visitors and virtual users across the world. This Plan has been developed together with our funding body, The Museums, Libraries, and Archives Council (MLA Council). So, what we do in the West Midlands will contribute to an England-wide renaissance for our sector.

Full details are on our web site www.mlawestmidlands.org.uk
Or you can order it in hard copy from info@mlawestmidlands.org.uk
Telephone: 0121 631 5800

MLA West Midlands is core funded by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and shares the following vision with them: “Museums, libraries and archives connect people to knowledge and information, creativity and inspiration.”

Museums, archives and libraries are at the heart of their **communities**, providing ready access to knowledge and information, contributing to community cohesion, reaffirming community **identity** and responding to local circumstances and needs.

People develop the **skills**, knowledge and qualities needed for life and work, through formal education and lifelong **learning**, by using the collections and services of museums, archives and libraries.

People use the **collections** and expertise of museums, libraries and archives as an inspiring source of **creative energy, innovation and ideas**.

Museums, libraries and archives are recognised as central to the **knowledge economy**, as main drivers of **cultural tourism**, and as being at the forefront of the **digital revolution**.

MLA West Midlands Welcome

The West Midlands has always been a region where enterprising people flourish. From the giants of the Industrial Revolution through the creativity and innovation of our artists and engineers to the businesses of today and the future, it is a distinctive place with distinctive people.

Providing leisure and tourism venues, information for business, a stimulus for regeneration and enjoyable opportunities for browsers and learners of all ages, are over 500 museums, libraries and archives of all sorts and sizes, employing over 6,000 staff and supported by around 4,000 volunteers. Their vast resources of knowledge both attract tourists and deliver services at a local level. They are both enjoyable places where people can safely explore old and new concepts and discover innovative pathways to a new sense of identity, and they provide virtual spaces filled with amazing knowledge.

MLA West Midlands: the regional council for museums, libraries and archives promotes and champions the contribution of museums, libraries and archives to key government agendas, demonstrating that they inspire, enrich and record the life, environment and works of all the region's people and enhance their cultural, social, educational and economic life.

Knowledge is the common currency of museums, libraries and archives. Investing in Knowledge is a five year vision shared with the national Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. It will enable every citizen to become involved in the exploration of the past and creation of the future.

Knowledge:

Stimulates economic growth

Underpins learning, empowering people to develop new skills

Is a social leveller and primary means for building new communities

Inspires and engages people with new experiences

West Midlands Museums

Of 204 Museums, 63 are run by local authorities and 145 are Registered within the national standards scheme. There is one mobile museum.

6 museum services are responsible for 21 outstanding Designated Collections.

The West Midlands museum Hub is led by Birmingham and also comprises Stoke-on-Trent, Wolverhampton, Ironbridge and Coventry.

Registered museums employ c2,500 staff and have the support of c3,500 volunteers.

In 2002 Registered museums in the West Midlands attracted 5.7 million visits.

West Midlands Libraries

14 local authorities run 305 static libraries and 51 mobile libraries. They employ c4,000 staff and receive around 32 million visits per year.

Higher Education provides around 40 libraries to over 150,000 students with around 11.3 million visits per year. Further Education more than 50, and schools around 2,000.

There are many other library and information services in the health, business and private sectors.

West Midlands Archives

24 repositories are run by 20 organisations in the region, employing 165 staff.

These include 11 local authority services which supported 220,000 usages in 2002.

There are also innumerable business and private archives.

MLA West Midlands Working for the sector

MLA West Midlands complements, supports and influences both direct service providers and those who fund and support them. We do this in three main ways:

Championing and assisting in the delivery of national initiatives. During 2004–7 we know we will be involved in delivering against *Renaissance in the Regions* (Museums), *Framework for the Future* (public libraries) and *Listening to the Past, Speaking to the Future* (Archives).

Exploiting the synergies that exist between the three domains of libraries, archives and museums, by developing cross-domain services and support for new ways of working.

Supporting the three different domains in ways that meet their distinct needs by working with the regional domain forums and other domain specific bodies.

We share our work with the national Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and sister agencies in the eight other English regions. The regional delivery of national initiatives will be developed in conjunction with the organisations which we serve in the region.

Wherever possible, we prefer to work with partners with related interests. Partners include high level national and regional bodies, the wider cultural and educational sectors, domain-specific bodies and groups, and the regional Museums Hub.

We welcome approaches from organisations which believe that we could productively work more closely together.

Where to find out more

The Essence is a snapshot of our plans and only highlights a few of our activities. The full Strategic and Operational Plan 2004-7 (16 pages) and its detailed Appendices (65 pages) are available on our website: www.mlwestmidlands.org.uk These are direct lines to the most appropriate member of staff.

Programme 1 Access and Inclusion	0121 631 5817
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MLA West Midlands Leadership and Advocacy

It is our ambition to create an environment where museums, libraries and archives can flourish in the region and where they can secure recognition and support for their cultural, educational, social and economic contribution to individuals and to the whole of society. Attracting investment in the sector will depend upon this.

We will:

Represent museums, libraries and archives regionally and nationally

Represent our sector in discussions about performance measures for culture

Provide a Funding Service including access to a national funding data base

Deliver a grant programme and seek partners to extend it

Seek ways to improve the business viability of the sector

Develop a network to encourage selling skills abroad

Explore improved marketing of the sector in the region

Work with the museums Hub in delivering *Renaissance in the Regions*

Support library groups in championing *Framework for the Future*

Develop a programme of work for archives arising from *Listening to the Past, Speaking to the Future*

Issue regular newsletters and e-alerts

Establish and maintain an interactive web site

Government Office in the West Midlands, Statement of Purpose

We are central Government in the West Midlands, working with partners in the Region and Ministers in Whitehall to ensure excellent government, thriving communities and attractive places in a prosperous economy.

MLA West Midlands Learning

Learning is what people do when they want to make sense of the world – it inspires creativity and supports everyday life. Museums, libraries and archives in the West Midlands provide a wide range of learning opportunities where people may develop or deepen their skills, their knowledge, understanding, awareness, values, ideas or feelings, or increase their capacity to reflect. MLA West Midlands supports and champions the work of the sector in both formal and informal learning.

We will:

Adopt and support the *Inspiring Learning for All* framework which recognises the impact of museum, library and archive experiences upon personal learning and provides a toolkit to improve provision

Manage Lit-Net – a website of events and news for readers, publishers, book shops and libraries

Work with the museums Hub to deliver their Education Programme Delivery Plan

Raise the profile of the sector's work in raising basic skills, particularly with Learning and Skills Councils and Advantage West Midlands (AWM)

Contribute to the development of standard 'learning impact' measures

Gather and disseminate data on the learning impact of programmes sponsored or managed by us

Develop and support a network of champions for learning in museums, libraries and archives

The vision of Advantage West Midlands, the Regional Development Agency

The West Midlands is recognised as a world class region in which to invest, work, learn, visit and live, and the most successful in creating wealth to benefit all of its people.

MLA West Midlands Access and Inclusion

People engage with our collections and services in personal and individual ways. To help museums, libraries and archives to develop accessible and inclusive services we will be concentrating on issues around cultural diversity, social inclusion and disability, within the context of neighbourhood renewal.

We will:

Help institutions to assess the accessibility and inclusiveness of their services by providing toolkits and facilitating training

Provide an accessible and up to date database of disability trainers and auditors

Look at how opening hours, disabled access and social inclusion could be improved in our sector across the West Midlands

Collect and disseminate case studies of good practice

Monitor whether institutions in the region meet Disability Discrimination Act and Race Relations Act requirements

Develop and support a networking group to enable all diversity and disability groups and practitioners to meet, exchange information and share good practice

Pilot the INSPIRE project which enables learners from across the region to access resources in both public and Higher Education libraries

MLA West Midlands Audience Development and Strategic Marketing

Although 45% of the West Midlands population use a library and 32% visit museums, our services are not reaching all the people who could benefit from them. The role of MLA West Midlands is to encourage and support museums, libraries and archives to re-evaluate their core services so they can respond to the needs of current, intending and new users on a long-term basis. To do this, we need to know more about users and non-users, their preferences and aspirations.

We will:

Work with West Midlands Life and others to gather and share information about our audiences and their needs

Adopt an MLA West Midlands audience development policy

Identify strategic marketing material for use by the sector, and commission new work to fill identified gaps in our knowledge

Work with other cultural agencies to develop socially inclusive services

Encourage a sector wide audience development /marketing network

Work with the BBC and Culture Online to gather electronic written testimony of World War 2 from non-technically literate people who lived through the war, including the urban and rural elderly poor. These will be collected through *The BBC People's War* website.

The vision of West Midlands Life, the Regional Cultural Consortium

Together we aim to make the West Midlands a very special place, offering the best you can find anywhere, with the widest range of choices, for the greatest number of people, contributing to prosperity for all and making a lasting difference.

MLA West Midlands E-Society

Museums, libraries and archives are both providers of quality material to the internet and places where the public can learn how to access it. The provision of online information and services, particularly through Broadband, helps to support people's learning, to build confident communities and to promote an inclusive society.

We will:

Monitor the level of connectivity of our sector institutions and seek ways to improve it

Help to develop the next stage of the People's Network so that it can meet local and individual needs

Manage the Advantage West Midlands Libraries Challenge and extend its remit

Co-ordinate a regional approach toward electronic content creation and digitisation policies in our sector

Assist in the development of regional cultural e-portal(s)

Support agreed ICT standards and interoperability rules for publicly funded schemes

Develop a three year MLA West Midlands ICT Policy and action plan

Promote the roles of the sector in the delivery of e-Government

MLA West Midlands Workforce development

Museums, libraries and archives attract a wide variety of passionate supporters. They may be paid staff or staff on fixed term contracts, consultants or volunteers, councillors, governors or trustees, but together, this 'workforce' is key to identifying and implementing changes in our sector. Workforce development covers individual, team and organisational development.

We will:

Work towards a sector workforce which is representative of our communities

Monitor labour market intelligence

Work with AWM and Learning and Skills Councils to develop a regional workforce development strategy

Contribute to a regional cultural training officer's forum and support NVQs

Encourage a creative approach to leadership

Respond to training and skills issues raised in *Renaissance in the Regions*, *Framework for the Future* and *Listening to the Past, Speaking to the Future*

Work with the museums Hub and county museums services to ensure that training is available to museums of all sizes

Assist the professional bodies for libraries and archives in maintaining appropriate training provision in our region

Work with the providers of e-learning and virtual learning environments

Provide links and signposts to training

Provide training bursaries

The Vision of the ICT Steering Group, Advantage West Midlands

The West Midlands region will exploit and co-ordinate Information and Communications Technologies to contribute to a productive, competitive and efficient environment that enhances the ways in which we work, learn and live.

MLA West Midlands Standards

Users of our services deserve the best. Measuring themselves against agreed standards helps institutions to improve their services to the people of the West Midlands and their visitors. We define standards widely, including codes of practice, best practice and guidelines, as well as the narrower definition of technical specifications. We acknowledge the diversity of the sector and the qualitative and quantitative nature of existing standards within it.

We will:

Engage with standards bodies developing new standards to ensure that they are fit for purpose

Provide commentaries as required by the Audit Commission and other bodies

Using existing evidence, gain a regional overview of standards achieved across the region in our sector

Develop programmes of support for professional standards in partnership with domain specific bodies

With the Museum Hub run Registration, the museums' national standard scheme, in the region

Implement the new Designation Scheme which will identify and support nationally important collections in museums, libraries and archives

Support the sector in compliance with the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts

Work with English Heritage to enable historic buildings that house our institutions to meet both domain and heritage conservation standards

MLA West Midlands Collections

Museums, archives and special libraries are guardians of the knowledge and stories held within their collections. These collections and resources should reflect the needs of our region and its people. While what we hold today may reflect the values and circumstances of the past, collecting policies need to be actively developed and updated in order to satisfy the needs of both our current and future users.

Collections management is not a luxury – if we do not know what we have got in our collections they can never be truly accessible, and if they are not in good condition then they will not survive.

We will:

Assess collecting policies

Assess the scale of cataloguing and documentation backlogs and develop a five year strategic programme to address them

Compare the strengths of regional collections with the level of digitisation and e-access

Develop a regional stewardship policy and strategy

Seek funding for a programme to address the conservation needs of special library collections in museums, libraries and archives, building on *Futures Together*

Support moves towards a joint store for historic periodicals

Support marketing and national campaigns to raise the profile of the region's collections

MLA West Midlands Research and Development

Advocacy is undermined if we do not have the evidence that we need to demonstrate that museums, libraries and archives are serious contributors to social and economic agendas. Research and data collection will underpin all of our other programmes.

For MLA West Midlands, research and development refers to a cluster of activities, with data collection at its core – the data being used to establish, develop and evaluate policies; measure impact; establish needs; measure progress; facilitate operational effectiveness; identify trends; underpin forecasting and prediction activities; support advocacy; and help the sector to secure resources.

We will:

Explain our priorities by publishing our research position statement

Analyse the research that we have inherited from the three pre-merger organisations, to assess its potential for re-use

Analyse the results of our consultation about urgent research needs, and produce a programme

Seek partnerships to fill our data gaps

Promote the principle that publicly funded research should be publicly available to the whole cultural sector

Develop and publish evidence for advocacy purposes

Develop an electronic information and data service

Commission a labour market information study to establish the significance of our sector in the regional labour economy

Encourage MLA nationally to undertake a study of the funding needs of our sector

The Vision of the West Midlands Regional Observatory

To offer public agencies, private firms and voluntary and community organisations in the West Midlands access to well

organised information, thereby enhancing and sharing understanding in and of the region and its sub regions and improving the quality of strategy formulation, policy making and service provision.

MLA West Midlands Review

The Board of MLA West Midlands monitors the progress of the full Strategic and Operational Plan at each of their meetings. Their approach is to be flexible enough to take advantage of opportunities for the sector which come up at short notice, but still to maintain the broad thrust of the vision. The whole plan is reviewed annually within a process that begins in September each year and is closely tied in to that of our core national funder, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.

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