

RECORD OFFICE FOR LEICESTERSHIRE, LEICESTER AND RUTLAND ACCESS POLICY

PROVISION OF THE SERVICE

The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland is provided by Leicestershire County Council in partnership with the City of Leicester and County of Rutland. This service is the means by which all three local authorities meet their legal responsibilities to collect, care for and provide access to records.

Access Policy Statement

The Record Office **makes available to all** the **written and digital heritage** of the counties of Leicestershire and Rutland and the City of Leicester. **Access exists within the framework of resources, legislative requirements and preservation needs.** The Record Office aims to **facilitate and extend access** by **understanding user needs** and ensuring that the **resources can be accessed in a variety of ways.**

Explanation:

1. Makes available to all

Approach to requests for access

The Record Office understands that access to the information it holds may be requested for many and varied reasons. We consider all requests to be important whether underpinned by simple curiosity or legal necessity. Although we may need to set priorities in time taken to reply all requestors will receive a thorough, professional and considered response which will give due regard to legal and ethical obligations. We shall consider each request on an individual basis in order to provide a reply which helps the requestor to the fullest possible extent. Researchers may be personal visitors or remote users and we make no distinction regarding quality of response based upon how we have been approached for information.

Presumption of openness and equality: This policy assumes that records will be open to the public unless there is a legitimate reason to deny access, for example, a legal prohibition. Researchers denied access will always have the reasons fully explained and be able to appeal any refusal. Access will not depend on purpose, subject or quality of research, frequency of use of the service or other irrelevant consideration. All researchers will be treated equally and data collected relating to the subject and purpose of research will be for statistical and monitoring purposes only.

Restrictions imposed by owners: Most owners deposit their records free of charge to be used by researchers. The owners of documents may request certain controls on access as a condition of deposit; however, unduly restrictive conditions will be discouraged. The Record Office will not accept collections which have excessively onerous access conditions attached or those which would conflict with the principle of equal access for all. All access conditions imposed by owners will be clearly communicated to users.

The community we serve: The Record Office takes the widest possible approach when defining our community of users and stakeholders and includes future generations whose needs we aim to anticipate. Our community includes those living within Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland as well as all those who have an interest in the history of our region. Physical visitors, remote users, social media followers, those who attend our outreach events or see exhibitions using our material, depositors and funding partners are all part of the community we serve. We also acknowledge that communities may include people of the same ethnicity or faith, those with shared interests and pursuits and individuals who have links to a particular organization or experience. We aim to facilitate access for all the disparate needs, interests and values which form our stakeholder community.

2. Written and Digital Heritage

Information is held in many forms and formats from parchment and paper to vinyl records, compact discs and other digitally stored data. The fast pace of the digital world means that records may be deposited and stored in transient and changing formats. In order to ensure present and future access to material the Record Office will endeavor to maintain the best possible storage conditions and suitable technologies appropriate to each format.

The written word is not necessarily always accessible: unfamiliarity with handwriting, language and its historical context can put much of our heritage out of reach for most people. It is therefore essential to provide guidance tailored to individual needs. The Record Office will ensure access to records by providing finding aids which explain, interpret and, where possible, translate the material in a way which enables more people to use and understand it. However, no finding aid can replace professional knowledge and expertise which enables the fullest use of the archive collections.

Information which is not in a hard copy format presents its own challenges. The Record Office will be active in maintaining ways to access all of its collections, for example, in migrating records to different formats as technology progresses. Managers and staff will aim to follow best professional practice and advice in order to ensure access for all to the collections held.

3. Access exists within the framework of resources, legislative requirements and preservation needs

Resources: The Record Office functions within available resources of budgets, space and staffing. Access to records exists within this framework; however, Leicestershire County Council and its partners will aim to ensure that access is not unduly or unreasonably curtailed due to lack of resources.

Legislative requirements:

Access to certain classes of records is governed by legislation. The main statutes governing access are the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA), the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR). The DPA covers rights of access to personal data. The FOIA and EIRs relate to the rights of citizens to have access to information held by public authorities.

The Human Rights Act (1998) will also inform, where relevant, decisions on access. Article 8: the right to private and family life includes (in case law) the right of an individual to understand their childhood and early development and to be helped to obtain information relating to this. Article 6: the right to a fair trial encompasses the right of an individual to obtain relevant information held pursuant to a case or tribunal. Provision of copies is also subject to legal controls such as the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act (1988).

Preservation needs: A principal duty of the Record Office is to ensure the long term preservation of the material in its custody. Access may need to be restricted if harm to the records would result but will only be refused as a last resort. The Record Office aims to make full use of available technology to facilitate access to records which are too fragile or damaged to be used. **More detail on preservation is given in our Preservation Policy.**

4. Facilitate and Extend Access

Physical and Remote Access:

Access to collections will be provided in a building with appropriate storage and public facilities including provision for those with disabilities. **More information is given in our Equalities Statement.**

Searchrooms will be invigilated by trained and qualified staff who will assist visitors and ensure the security of the collections.

It is recognized that many people will not be able to visit the office in person or may not wish to. Access to finding aids, collections and professional advice and support will be

provided to remote users in the most effective ways possible, making best use of available technologies.

Awareness of the service:

The Record Office understands that to ensure the widest possible access to the resources, users and potential users must be provided with information about the service. This will be produced in a variety of formats and aim for extensive coverage so that all those who wish to use the service understand how to do so. Collections development and related policies will recognise access as an integral part of service provision to all individuals and communities.

Outreach events and activities will aim to reach those near and far to ensure awareness of the service for all who have need of it. Further information is given in our Engagement Policy.

Requests for access:

The Record Office is happy to accept requests for access in a variety of formats including by letter, email, telephone, in person and via social media. Where we receive communications in other languages we shall make every effort to translate and understand the request and to respond appropriately.

5. Understanding User Needs

Collection of user data: The Record Office will participate in national and local surveys, benchmarking and other exercises which will enable a greater understanding our users and their needs. These currently include the Public Services Quality Group survey of visitors to British Archives and the annual CIPFA Survey.

Users will be encouraged to comment on the service provided and all feedback will be considered seriously and acted upon where appropriate and resources allow.

Non users: The service aims to understand the needs of non-users by identifying groups which are under-represented in profiles of users. Where possible, steps will be taken to engage with non-users and understand the reasons they have for not using the service. The Record Office will aim to break down barriers to use of the service by the widest possible audience. It will actively promote its collections to ensure as many people as possible are aware of the service.

6. Resources can be accessed in a variety of ways

Records may be accessed in a number of ways. These include personal consultation during public opening hours, provision of surrogates (e.g. microform, digital media) or research undertaken by a third party. The Record Office aims to provide choices, where possible, in how information is made available and to comply with customer requests relating to format when supplying copies.

We shall provide an accessible building, suitable for all, to enable consultation of the records in person.

The Record Office will seek to ensure that all who wish to can use the service. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Staff will be trained in and support equalities principles relating to protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010 and include gender, race, age, disability, faith and belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity and marriage and civil partnership.
- Provision of access to people who cannot visit in person through the extension of online facilities and advice and research services.
- Acquiring, where possible, specialist equipment to enable those with disabilities to use the records.

7. Review of this policy

No policy can cover every eventuality in perpetuity. The statements in this policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure that they remain relevant and appropriate. This may be undertaken annually or in response to a specific event such as new legislation.

All managers and staff are expected to act with integrity and in a professional manner at all times, seeking to find solutions where the policy fails to give guidance and highlighting any shortcomings or useful additions as soon as possible.

In these ways the Record Office aims to maintain policies which are current and living documents, supporting our approach to service provision rather than dictating it and enshrining our values to provide clarity for all in what we will do and how we will act.

Established February 2009

Reviewed February 2018

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