

The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland

Archive Access Policy 2023-28

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Mission Statement: *We aim to collect and preserve the written, printed, recorded and digital heritage of Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland and encourage as many people as possible to access, use and contribute to this rich and diverse archive in many different ways.*

1.2 The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (ROLLR) 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.

1.3 We are an area with a rich history that values its heritage, engages its communities, welcomes those who visit here, and works together with other agencies and organisations to ensure a future for the past. We will do everything that we can to achieve this, whilst recognising the limitations of our building/s and resources, by offering the broadest, most engaging and relevant access for all our users.

1.4 Our Collections Policy (2023-28) sets out how we want to ensure that all our communities can be represented within the collections which we make accessible and preserve for the future on their behalf.

1.5 This Access Policy states our intention to engage openly, positively and equally with those communities and our commitment to achieve equality of opportunity by working to remove, or minimise, barriers that prevent people engaging with our archive service. This includes our buildings, collections, website, social media channels, learning programmes, events, volunteer opportunities and engaging with our staff.

1.6 The Record Office wants to create a culture where people of all backgrounds and experiences feel appreciated and valued and where we provide access for everyone regardless of ability, age, gender, cultural or social background, sexual orientation, faith, language, location or wealth.

1.7 The Record Office is recognised by The National Archives as an Accredited Archive Service.

2.0 Scope

2.1 The policy covers provision at The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, which is a partnership between Leicestershire County, Leicester City and Rutland County Councils. It extends to our building and collection facilities, our website and other online activities, and in other venues where we might deliver outreach and engagement programmes such as schools, universities and community venues.

2.2 The policy relates to access for our users and does not cover access in relation to staff, volunteers, freelancers, or contractors, which are addressed elsewhere in our policies and procedures.

3.0 Purpose

3.1 The purpose of this policy is to state our commitment to increasing access to our services and resources by identifying ways to provide an accessible, engaging, innovative, sustainable, relevant, and responsive service of the highest quality.

4.0 Definition of terms

4.1 When we refer to access, we mean the opportunity to engage with our service through our building/s, collections, content, events, and expertise. We have listed the key barriers to access below, with an example to illustrate how they could be experienced.

- **Attitudinal** - e.g. Some people may feel that the Record Office is not relevant to them, and our service does not reflect their lived experiences.
- **Intellectual** - e.g. Some people may find our procedures unfamiliar and our collections difficult to access or understand.
- **Cultural** - e.g. Some people may feel that our collections do not reflect their communities, social and cultural heritage or interests.
- **Economic** - e.g. Some people may not be able to afford to use some of our services or have access to the internet where we publish our online catalogue.
- **Geographic** - e.g. Some people may not be able to visit our sites due to their location (many of our collections are nationally and internationally relevant).
- **Physical/sensory** - e.g. Some people with physical disabilities, limited mobility, hearing or visual impairment may not be able to, or may find it challenging to access our building, services, collections, activities, websites, or social media channels.
- **Technological** - e.g. Some people may not have access to the internet and therefore are excluded from our digital content.

5.0 Responsibilities

5.1 The Record Office reviews performance, policies, and procedures through the County Council's governance and reporting structure and through the Partnership Board which includes representatives from the three Partner authorities. Cabinet is responsible for the executive functions

and decisions of the Council. The Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinises the executive functions and decisions of the County Council in respect of the Adults and Communities Department. Together they help ensure the Record Office, the Department and the Council meet their obligations under the Equality Act (2010) through doing everything reasonably possible to make the service accessible to the widest range of people and improve lives through culture.

5.2 The Head of Service is responsible for ensuring service managers work with their teams and colleagues to maximise access by addressing the barriers outlined above.

5.3 It is the responsibility of all County Council employees and volunteers to behave in ways that promote equality and are non-discriminatory. This also applies to the way they behave to members of the public in the delivery of services and through the development and maintenance of sites to be as accessible as possible.

5.4 Our service carries out regular evaluation with audiences and consults stakeholders on any proposed changes to services. We are committed to improving our understanding of our non-users to help ensure the broadest possible access to our facilities, services, and collections.

5.5 Leicestershire County Council have a Corporate Equalities Policy and Action Plan, this is disseminated through Departmental Equality Groups, which focus on addressing areas for improvement and reviewing Equalities Impact Assessments (EIA). We will complete and EIA for any new provision and changes to existing provision.

6.0 Policy statements

6.1 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.**

6.2 These statements are explained below.

6.3 “Makes available to all”

6.3.1 Approach to requests for access: The Record Office understands that access to the information it holds may be requested for many and varied reasons.

6.3.2 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. 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. Researchers denied access for legitimate reasons will always have the reasons fully explained and be able to appeal any refusal.

6.3.3 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 (see Record Office Collections Policy 2023-28) All access conditions imposed by owners will be clearly communicated to users.

6.3.4 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.

6.4 “Written and Digital Heritage”

6.4.1 Information is held in many forms and formats from parchment and paper to vinyl records, compact discs and other digitally stored data. In order to ensure present and future access to material the Record Office will endeavour to maintain the best possible storage conditions and suitable technologies appropriate to each format.

6.4.2 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.

6.4.3 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 its collections, for example, in migrating records to different formats.

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

6.5.1 Resources: The Record Office functions within available resources of budgets, space and staffing. Access to records exists within this framework.

6.5.2 Legislative requirements: Access to certain classes of records is governed by legislation. The main statutes governing access are the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA), the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR) and the and the General Data Protection Regulation 2021 (GDPR).

6.5.3 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.

6.5.4 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.

6.5.5 Provision of copies is also subject to legal controls such as the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act (1988).

6.5.6 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 handled.

6.6 Facilitate and Extend Access

6.6.1 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.

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

6.6.3 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.

6.6.4 To ensure the widest possible access to the resources, users and potential users must be provided with information about the service.

6.6.5 Audience development and participation activities will ensure awareness of the service for all who have need of it.

6.6.6 Requests for access: The Record Office responds to requests for access in a variety of formats including by letter, email, telephone, in person and via social media.

6.7 Understanding User Needs

6.7.1 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, the annual CIPFA Survey and regular review of comments, complaints and compliments.

6.7.2 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.

6.7.3 Non-users: The service aims to understand the needs of non-users by identifying groups which are under-represented in profiles of users. We will aim to break down barriers to use of the service by the widest possible audience and will actively promote its collections to ensure as many people as possible are aware of the service.

6.8 Resources can be accessed in a variety of ways

6.8.1 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 and online access through third parties) or research undertaken by a third party.

6.8.2 We shall provide an accessible building and with adaptive technology to enable access to the records in person.

6.8.3 The Record Office will seek to ensure that all who wish to can use the service.

- 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.

6.9 We are committed to maximising access and will uphold the statutory requirements of the Equality Act (2010). We will do this in a number of ways, including, but not limited to:

6.10 Physical/Sensory access

6.10.1 Physical access to the Record Office is an essential requirement for our service delivery and we will take all reasonable steps to ensure our building is accessible to all. We work in an historic building and, whilst this presents us with some accessibility challenges, we will overcome these by:

- Providing accessible seating throughout our public spaces including our search rooms.
- Ensuring our building and facilities are accessible and have adaptive technology where possible.
- Providing alternative engagement opportunities when access is difficult.
- Providing access to online content for those who cannot leave their homes or access the Record Office search rooms.
- Considering sensory requirements in the design of our buildings, exhibitions and engagement.
- Striving to consult on sensory requirements with users and non-users and working with specialist organisations.
- Providing quieter spaces with less sensory engagement for those who need it.
- Providing training for staff and volunteers.

6.11 Intellectual access

6.11.1 We recognise that not everybody thinks, learns and understands in the same way and we will try to provide a variety of ways to provide access to the archives and information that we have.

6.11.2 We will do this by:

- Providing signage and information that is accessible to a broad range of visitors.
- Ensuring that our staff are able to 'translate' and interpret archival documents which are not easily understood by many people.
- Using best practice standards and guidelines (including the Museums Style Guide and MENCAP guidelines) to ensure the text we use in exhibitions, educational resources, publications, websites and social media channels meet the needs of our intended audiences.
- Providing a varied learning programme for schools, SEN schools and SEN units in mainstream schools through the Creative Learning Service team.
- Ensuring our staff receive training and resources to support them to tailor our services to meet the needs of different audiences.
- Using technology and providing information in other formats to help people engage with our collections.
- Evaluating our online presence to make sure that we are communicating effectively.
- Consulting with specialist user groups and organisations to make sure that we are doing things in the right way.
- Working in a collaborative way with specific groups to make sure that our services are accessible to people with a wide range of learning skills.

6.12 Attitudinal access

6.12.1 We will strive to remove barriers to our service created due to a lack of understanding, misconceptions or bias.

6.12.2 We will do this by:

- Engaging with a range of communities and groups to understand potential barriers, including those where there are low levels of engagement.
- Fully embedding our shared corporate values of Positivity; Trust & Respect; Flexibility; Openness & Transparency; Confidence, Clarity, Respectfulness, Fairness and Accountability.
- Providing training that supports our staff and volunteers to effectively communicate and engage with different types of service users.
- Ensuring our activities and platforms do not use negative stereotypes or re-enforce misconceptions.

6.13 Cultural access

6.13.1 We recognise that our collections and public profile may not reflect the cultural experiences, heritage and interests of all the communities of Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland and therefore we will strive to reflect our communities better.

6.13.2 We will do this by:

- Evaluating and identifying areas where we can improve the relevance of our collections to communities who are not currently well represented.
- Working in a collaborative way with our service Participation and Audience Development team and with specific groups and communities to remove cultural barriers and make sure that our collections and public profile are more representative.
- Ensuring our staff and volunteers receive training and resources to support them to identify and overcome cultural barriers to accessing our services.
- Consulting with specialist user groups and organisations to make sure that we are doing things in the right way.

6.14 Economic access

6.14.1 We recognise that our geographic location and some of the charges which we make can prevent some audiences from accessing our building and some of our services, so we will ensure we offer a variety of access arrangements and price points to make it easier for these audiences to engage with us.

6.14.2 We will do this by:

- Offering remote access to our collections, knowledge and services.
- Offering a variety of prices within our retail offer and our charges.
- Offering free activities and resources on site and online.
- Further developing online resources and a schools learning offer delivered by Creative Learning Services for schools that cannot afford transport to our building.

6.15 Geographic access

6.15.1 We are a single site, located in a town on the immediate outskirts of Leicester with public transport links to the city and its railway and central bus stations. We have limited free car parking for service users. However, we acknowledge that it is difficult for some service users (especially

international users) to visit us in person. We will continue to develop ways of giving access to our collections and knowledge remotely. We will also seek to develop new ways of allowing audiences to engage with us in different ways.

6.15.2 We will do this by:

- Providing a remote enquiry service which includes telephone, written and email enquiries.
- Loaning our collections and exhibitions to other venues, archives, museums and galleries locally, nationally and internationally.
- Providing quality online experiences and resources which enable local people, people from across the UK and from around the world to engage with our collections and stories.
- Continuing to develop our remote learning offer in partnership with LCC's Creative Learning Service and by building relationships with our three local universities.
- Working with the Participation and Audience development team to engage with those people who are unable to visit the Record Office for a wide variety of reasons.

6.16 Technical access

6.16.1 New technologies are providing new ways for us to interpret and share our collections; tell the stories contained within them and engage with our audiences. However, we recognise lack of access to technology, poor content and systems and applications that do not meet access standards create new barriers for audiences and we are committed to avoiding this.

6.16.2 We will do this by:

- Making our website and mobile applications accessible, in accordance with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018.
- Ensuring that our onsite WIFI provision allows our users to engage with our digital content on their own specialist devices if required, as well as providing networked pcs with access to the internet for our visitors to use.
- Aiming to make access to our own specialist and technical expertise and resources fully available to all, including those who cannot access our digital offer, through visits, on-site engagement, activities and events, and remote enquiries and contact.
- Learning from and sharing with technological learning and practice with other heritage and community organisations.

7.0 Related policies, legislation, and guidance

7.1 Government

- The Equality Act 2010 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication/accessible-communication-formats>
- Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018.

7.2 Leicestershire County Council

- Leicestershire County Council's Equality Strategy 2020-24 Action Plan 2020-21
<https://leics.sharepoint.com/sites/intranet/AboutUs/Pages/Equality-Strategy.aspx>
- International WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility standard <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/about-the-council/equality-and-diversity/equalities-policy-statement>

7.3 ROLLR Policies

- Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Collections Development Policy 2023-2028
- Leicestershire County Council Museum Collections Management Framework
- Leicestershire County Council Museum Collections Development Policy

7.4 Guidance

- Autism East Midlands Environmental Audit
- Association for Accessible formats <https://www.ukaaf.org/>

8.0 Review of this policy

8.1 This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure that it remains relevant and appropriate. This may be undertaken regularly, or in response to a specific event such as new legislation.

8.2 Final date of review and renewal is 2028.

8.3 Previous Review Dates

8.3.1 Established: February 2009

8.3.2 Reviewed: January 2014, October 2016, October 2017, January 2021, May 2023

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