

Gloucestershire Archives @ The Hub

Access and Customer Services Policy

1. Policy statement and purpose

Gloucestershire Archives is committed to providing the broadest possible access to our collections, services and Heritage Hub facilities and to maintaining high standards of customer service at all times. All access will be fair, consistent and in line with professional best practice and relevant legislation – on-site, off-site and on-line.

2. Scope

This policy sets out Gloucestershire Archives' priorities for customer care, whilst accessing collections held at Gloucestershire Archives, including local and family history resources. We aim to meet our customers' needs with efficiency, effectiveness and courtesy, making the Heritage Hub a welcoming and inclusive space for all. We are committed to the same standards whilst providing services off-site and on-line.

3. Terminology

Archives are the record of everyday activities of governments, organisations, businesses and individuals. Archives may take many different forms – handwritten, typed, printed, photographic or electronic – and include audio-visual material such as video and sound recordings. As authentic and reliable records, they are preserved permanently because of their evidential and historical value.

Protected groups are identified in the Equality Act 2010 as sharing a particular characteristic against which it is illegal to discriminate. These groups¹ are: age, disability,

¹ For a definition of each group please see the Equality & Human Rights Commission's guidance www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics

gender, marriage and civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, race; religion and belief; sex; sexual orientation

4. Background

Gloucestershire Archives gathers archive collections and local and family history resources to ensure they are kept secure and made accessible.

We are an accredited archive service recognised by The National Archives as the place of deposit for public records relating to Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire.

We are a Gloucestershire County Council service. By agreement, we also provide an archive service for South Gloucestershire Council and are the appointed record office for the Diocese of Gloucester.

We are a lead partner in the Gloucestershire Heritage Hub, a network of local people and organisations created in 2017 with a common interest in our historic county's documented heritage. The network benefits from Hub facilities at Alvin Street, Gloucester and a Hub website, and its members support each other to gather, keep and share their personal and community archives.

5. Methods of Access

You can access our collections in the following ways:

On-site: By coming to Gloucestershire Archives at the Heritage Hub in Alvin Street, Gloucester, GL1 3DW. Anyone following our rules [and booking procedures required during the coronavirus restrictions] is welcome. Typical reasons for visiting include people seeking to defend their rights, for example, in relation to rights of way, personal identity and entitlement to benefits; people participating in our training and learning activities; people seeking to develop new skills and interests; people who are researching the history of their family, house or area; people undertaking professional or academic research; people working on their own collections.

People also visit (by appointment) to donate or deposit items which then become part of our collections. We also welcome volunteers who undertake a range of roles including providing increased access to our collections, or helping maintain our community garden

which is available for all visitors to enjoy. The site is fully accessible. The link to our access statement is given at section 15 below.

Off-site: We provide learning and outreach activities around Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire to children, young people, families and lifelong learners, often in partnership or using published Archives learning resources. We respond to people calling or writing with enquiries about our collections and services, often those unable to visit in person and customers who wish to obtain copies of documents. Some local studies materials (such as newspapers and maps) and books you can borrow to read at home are available in selected Gloucestershire libraries. Some of our volunteering activities are also appropriate for those wishing to contribute from home.

On-line: We provide advice and information on our holdings, services, facilities and events via our website, our online catalogue and our social media platforms for all audiences. Whilst we aim to deliver more services and resources on-line, less than 5% of our unique archives collection is currently available digitally due to the significant resources required to digitise and publish our collections. We are also working to make our website fully accessible.

6. Customer Profile

We are committed to making our collections and services available to all sections of society. At present our customers are over-represented in the over 50 age group and are predominantly white. We will, of course, continue to welcome our loyal customers who tend to spend between 1 and 6 hours per visit. We will also focus on audience development activities (such as community engagement, volunteering, learning, outreach, social media and digitisation) to encourage a broader range of people to benefit from our archives, on-site, off-site and on-line, and to ensure our collections are more representative.

7. Our guiding principles in terms of access

7.1 Safeguard the collections in our care, including digitally born and digitally stored documents, cataloguing and conserving them before making them accessible

7.2 Develop our archive collections and local and family history resources to ensure they represent the full richness of Gloucestershire's and South Gloucestershire's diverse communities and are accessible to all²

7.3 Make our collections available now and for the long term, so people can access unique information that may inform their learning and decision making, and help them to defend their rights

7.4 Enable access for all by breaking down physical, sensory, intellectual, cultural, geographical, social, economic and attitudinal barriers³

7.5 Prioritise addressing cataloguing and conservation backlogs (which prevent full access to our collections); recruit and support volunteers to use their local or specialist expertise to help open up and interpret our collections.

7.6 Improve access to born-digital and digitised material on-site and on-line as resources permit

7.7 Develop, understand and sustain audiences (archives users and not-yet-users)

7.8 Create and provide a range of archives-inspired learning opportunities

7.9 Support people to look after, get involved in and share their community heritage

7.10 Be aware of and respond to customer needs and changing circumstances, providing the best possible access with the resources available

7.11 Communicate what we do by marketing and advocacy

7.12 Use evaluation as a tool to improve standards and demonstrate impact

7.13 Wherever possible, work with other Hub providers to achieve the above, securing external funding to support related activity

7.14 Wherever possible, work in partnership to increase impact

² We recognise that some of our documents are in Latin, in difficult handwriting, or in non-standard digital formats. In such cases we will make these documents available and highlight resources or tools to help make them more accessible.

³ Please see footnote 2 above.

8. Access restrictions

There are certain instances where access may be restricted.

Legal reasons: The Data Protection Act 2018 protects the personal information about living individuals. Some records can therefore be closed for up to 100 years. Individuals wishing to access material about themselves should apply to the County Council via the Subject Access process⁴. Others wishing to undertake research in closed records should apply in writing to the Head of Archives Service. There is an established County Council process to review such applications on a case by case basis. Access to a very small proportion of material is restricted due to commercially sensitive material or Freedom of Information exemptions.

Donors and depositors: Most of the documents in our collections are owned by individuals and public bodies. These owners (depositors) occasionally specify that their permission is needed before looking at or copying some of their documents. And on rare occasions people who have given documents to us (donors) specify similar restrictions. We will let you know where this is the case.

Preservation: We are committed to caring for and providing access to documents in our collections, both now and in the future. Some documents may not be able to be viewed because they are too fragile or require conservation and handling could cause further damage. Please let us know in writing if you require access for a significant reason and we will work together to identify funding/resources to undertake the necessary conservation and/or provide a surrogate copy.

Surrogates: Where copies are available the original will not be used unless the duty staff agree the surrogate is deficient. The availability of copies should be clearly marked in our catalogues and finding aids.

Uncatalogued collections: We will do our best to give access to uncatalogued collections but in some cases access may be restricted or delayed due to staff time required to find the required information.

Electoral registers: Access is subject to specific legislation. Those under 10 years old can only be consulted under supervision and copied solely by handwritten notes – no other copying is permitted by law.

⁴

<https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/data-protection/your-information-rights/>

Digital archives: We have a small but growing collection of born-digital records. Access is usually via a standalone computer in the research room at the Heritage Hub. We usually require at least 5 days' notice as we generally need to make a bespoke copy for you to access. Such collections will be clearly marked in our on-line catalogue.

9. What customers can expect from us

We will:

- provide a friendly service, showing respect, courtesy and sensitivity
- recognise and respond to your needs, which may include signposting you to one of our partners or another service
- deal with your enquiries and requests accurately, promptly and efficiently
- offer an explanation if we can't answer your enquiry or request
- establish customer service standards in accordance with Gloucestershire County Council's standards, monitor our performance, and adjust if required
- continue to develop staff and volunteers' skills and expertise
- welcome your feedback, undertake regular consultation and adjust our services accordingly

10. What we expect from our customers

That you will:

- consider others whilst in the Heritage Hub so that everyone can use and enjoy the space
- remain calm and courteous
- follow the on-site rules (for example, in the research room)
- adhere to any access conditions or restrictions in place
- if things go wrong, give us a chance to put things right as soon as we can

11. Customer Consultation

You are welcome to give us feedback when engaging with us on-site, off-site and on-line. We will also regularly seek the views of our customers through periodic customer surveys; consultation exercises publicised on our website, our quarterly newsletter, and/or through social media; project evaluation and feedback opportunities; and via our Heritage Hub User Group⁵. We also undertake regular consultation with key stakeholders and partners. Feedback from consultation is used to adjust our services accordingly.

12. If you have a complaint

Complaints should be raised directly with staff on duty initially. We aim to:

- understand the problem
- identify the cause
- propose solutions that are acceptable to all parties
- solve the problem

If you are not satisfied with our initial response and require further action, please write to the Customer Services Manager at Gloucestershire Archives, Gloucestershire Heritage Hub, Clarence Row, Alvin Street, Gloucester GL1 3DW or by email to archives@gloucestershire.gov.uk marked for the attention of the Customer Services Manager. We aim to respond within 15 working days.

13. Equalities and diversity

Gloucestershire Archives is firmly committed to the principles of equality and diversity in the workforce and in the service we provide to customers.

We treat all customers, and anyone else we come into contact with, equally and with dignity and respect. We do not discriminate on grounds of age, disability status, employment status, ethnic or cultural origin, gender or gender reassignment, marital status, nationality,

⁵ Details of membership and meetings available at Reception

religious belief or non-belief, responsibility for dependants, sexual orientation, social background, or any other grounds which cannot be shown to be justified. We will recognise, respect and value difference and diversity.

We have undertaken an equalities impact assessment of our policies. The resultant Due Regard Statement is available on request. We also produce an annual equalities report documenting our response to our Public Sector Equalities Duty, and our own commitment to providing the broadest possible access.

14. Roles and responsibilities

The Community Heritage Development Manager and the Senior Archivist & Customer Services Manager are responsible for access arrangements and will oversee the delivery of this policy.

15. References

This policy should be read alongside other related Archives policies, and our customer care standards, to be found at www.goucestershire.gov.uk/archives/policies

It complies with:

- Public Services Quality Group's 'Standard for Access to Archives'
http://www.archives.org.uk/images/documents/access_standard_2008.pdf
- Equality and Human Rights Commission guidance
<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics>
- <https://www.goucestershire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/complaints-and-feedback/customer-care-standards/>

Please see our access statement at: <https://www.goucestershire.gov.uk/archives/plan-your-visit/opening-hours-and-access/>

Local and family history resources available in Gloucestershire libraries are summarised here:
<https://www.goucestershire.gov.uk/archives/starting-your-research/starting-to-research-the-history-of-your-area/>

16. Review and revision

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years.

Document Control

Author:	Sally Middleton, Community Heritage Development Manager and Helen Bartlett, Senior Archivist & Customer Services Manager
Owner:	Heather Forbes, Head of Archives Service
Approval Body	Gloucestershire Archives Management Team (GAMT)
Date Approved	November 2020
Document Number:	v.1.0

Version history – Access Policy

Version	Version date	Summary of Changes
v1.0	October 2013	Approved by GAMT after consultation
v1.1	September 2014	Brief review and minor re-formatting
v1.2	January 2018	New template and minor amendments to remove references to Information Management
v1.3	March 2020	Brief review, minor amendments made

Version history – Customer Service Policy

Version	Version date	Summary of Changes
v1.0	June 2017	New policy
v1.1	January 2018	New template and minor review

Version history – Access and Customer Service Policy

Version	Version date	Summary of changes

v1.0

Oct 2020

Major review and Access Policy and Customer Services Policy
amalgamated to create new Access and Customer Services Policy.

Date of next revision: 2023