

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE

## STAFFORDSHIRE AND STOKE ON TRENT ARCHIVE SERVICE POLICY AND STRATEGY FOR ACCESS, AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Archives provide rich and vital sources of information about past and present life in Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent. This information is essential in helping to foster and inspire a sense of place, time and belonging. Archives help to bring the past to life, help us to understand why our present world is as it is and support the role of today's citizen.
- 1.2 The role of the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service is to locate, collect and preserve Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent's irreplaceable written heritage and to make it widely available to the people of the county and its visitors. Through our work we support formal, self-directed and informal learning by people of all ages and levels of ability.
- 1.3 Use of archives across the UK remains low with only 6% of the population making use of them. The majority of people consider that archives have no relevance to them or to their activities. About 14% of the population has no opinion at all about the relevance of archives to their situation<sup>1</sup>. The Archive Service is committed to promoting and increasing the understanding, use and enjoyment of archives by encouraging more people to come to archives and find in them a fascinating insight into our heritage and culture.
- 1.4 We also have a clear commitment to supporting the learning and development of our staff so that they can help to provide a knowledgeable and enjoyable experience for visitors to our service and for people using archives at a distance.
- 1.5 In the archive context, access, audience development and learning go hand in hand. Without the first, we cannot achieve the second or the third. Improving, facilitating and enhancing physical as well as remote

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<sup>1</sup> Museums Libraries and Archives Council: Taking Part Survey, 2007

and virtual access to the archive collections in our care is a fundamental objective of the Service.

- 1.6 This policy is a revision and extension of the Access and Learning Policy and Strategy approved in November 2005. The closely related and overlapping areas of access, learning and audience development lend themselves to a single policy document. The revision has been informed the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council's (MLA) Inspiring Learning for All Framework. Additionally the Archive Service seeks through this policy to support the outcomes of Every Child Matters and in particular sees itself as being able to make a positive contribution to the third outcome of *Enjoying and Achieving*. The policy is supported by our Cultural Diversity Policy, Web Content Strategy and Media Guidelines.

## **2. Policy Aims**

- 2.1 The policy aims have been structured to reflect the generic social and learning outcomes of Inspiring Learning for All. These are:

- 2.2 To promote equality of access to the content of archive collections and provide equality of opportunity to make personal use of them by:

- providing and developing services and environments, which are welcoming, user friendly and knowledgeable and which support the needs of new and different kinds of users
- by enriching people's lives and inspire them through acquiring knowledge and developing related skills
- consulting with existing audiences to identify their learning needs and expectations and develop approaches to meet those needs successfully
- reaching new audiences who are currently not engaged with archives, recognising that appreciation of their value does not always have to be through personal use

- 2.3 To encourage the use of archives for learning and enjoyment by:

- promoting and developing in others an appreciation and awareness of the rich archival heritage of Staffordshire and stimulate an understanding and enjoyment of what archives have to offer
- developing innovative ways of interpreting and using archive collections for learning and enjoyment at all levels and by all ages
- seeking to collaborate with others across the heritage sector to improve, develop and enhance learning opportunities

2.3 To support the delivery of the corporate objectives of Staffordshire County Council and Stoke on Trent City Council and of the Local Area Agreement and to contribute positively towards the objectives of the Culture and Libraries Division of SCC and the Customer Services Division of SoTCC.

- To ensure that our staff have appropriate skills and awareness to ensure equality of service provision
- To support staff in acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to ensure valuable and enjoyable learning experiences for our audiences

### **3. Policy Direction**

3.1 This policy seeks to develop further the considerable progress which the Archive Service has made over the last 10 years in the three related areas of access, audience development and learning. Renewed accreditations against the Charter Mark Standard for excellence in public service ensure that continuous improvement is embedded in our service culture.

3.2 We will continue to consult with our customers and partners to ensure that we build upon the successes of the past and learn from activities where we have been less successful.

3.3 As with all other archive services, we will seek to attract new audiences for archives so that more people can benefit from the information and enjoyment which archives can offer. We also recognise the significance of working more closely with local communities and community groups to offer support and encouragement for local projects.

- 3.4 It is equally important not to neglect the areas of current strength and support, which lie very much with lifelong learners and older people who have more time to devote to archive related activities. Ensuring that we can maintain, satisfy and develop their interests will continue to be a key priority for the Archive Service.
- 3.5 Our access, audience development and learning activities need to reflect clearly the good practice identified for cultural services in MLA's Inspiring Learning for All framework.
- 3.6 Details of our current practices in relation to access, audience development and learning are at Appendix 1.

#### **4. Strategic Policy Objectives, 2007-2009**

- To ensure that existing programmes to enhance access and learning are prioritised in the Archive Service implementation plans of 2007/2008 and 2008/2009
- To maintain our existing activities in relation to access, learning and audience development as detailed in the Appendix to this policy subject to budgetary provision
- To extend consultation with users on access and learning issues
- To review the accessibility action plan, 2007/2009
- To develop further community-based projects using the Boots and Shoes project template for successful delivery subject to external funding provision
- To develop new learning opportunities through the use of archives
- To implement the Archive Service web content strategy
- To evaluate the outcomes of the Sutherland Papers project as a model for future audience development
- To develop links with new and non-traditional organisations
- To develop activities to engage isolated and hard to reach groups
- To review and develop channels and networks used to provide information about the Archive Service and its collections and to investigate and evaluate developing strategies to support this
- To introduce marketing activities to promote the service
- To develop a structured media programme for the promotion of archives
- To sustain and develop the volunteer working scheme

#### **5. Staff**

- 5.1 Our staff training and development policy focuses on enabling our staff to deliver our services efficiently and effectively by ensuring that they have the requisite knowledge to carry out their respective roles. Regular awareness and training sessions enable our staff to provide a Regular awareness and training sessions are designed to help our staff to provide a courteous, knowledgeable and friendly service. We also seek to build competencies to ensure confidence in the ability of staff to support learning activity in formal and informal ways.

## **6. Evaluation**

- 6.1 Evaluation and consultation are fundamental to continuing improvement and to the success of this policy. We evaluate all our activities and public events for their learning as well as for other outcomes. To help us to do this, we have improved and will continue to develop the evaluation skills of staff.
- 6.2 We consult with teachers on the outcomes of teacher training days and with teachers and pupils after school visits to evaluate the learning outcomes.
- 6.3 Methods of consultation about our services are regularly reviewed to ensure that user comments and views inform the development of our service and its activities.

## **7. Partnerships**

- 7.1 Successful partnerships are vital to promote the information, practical, heritage and cultural value of archives. We maintain a wide range of partnerships both inside and outside the County and are seeking to develop our range of partners further. The establishment of regular partnership consultation meetings from 2007 will enable us to explore greater co-operation between partners to maximise the potential of archives and our service for others.
- 7.2 One of our most successful informal partnerships is with our growing number of volunteers as part of our volunteer scheme. We see the continuation and expansion of volunteer working and work experience placements as ideal opportunities to attract a wider range of new users to archives, as well as giving regular archive users the opportunity to put something back into archives.

## **8. Policy review**

8.1 This policy will be reviewed by 2009.

## Appendix

### STAFFORDSHIRE AND STOKE ON TRENT ARCHIVE SERVICE

#### CURRENT PRACTICES IN RELATION TO ACCESS, AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

##### Access

##### *Using archives in person*

- Our reading rooms at the Staffordshire Record Office, Lichfield Record Office and Stoke on Trent City Archives are open free of charge to all during widely advertised opening hours. The Archive Service also manages the William Salt Library Stafford, which is also freely open to the public.
- All our record offices provide some non-standard opening hours for those people who cannot visit during the working week.
- We provide extensive information about our services and how to use them on our web site [www.staffordshire.gov.uk/archives](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/archives) and through a range of published and widely distributed information. Our information is regularly reviewed
- Our aim is to provide access to documents equitably and as fully as possible with due reference to the Data Protection Act, 1998, the Freedom of Information Act, 2005, and any conditions imposed on use by the owners of privately-deposited collections. In some cases we are required to consult the owners of these collections if their use is sought in connection with legal proceedings.
- We provide advice and guidance about using archives to personal visitors. However we do not provide opinions or advice in connection with the legal interpretation of documents.
- We aim to catalogue new collections as soon as is reasonably practicable and we have an ongoing programme to reduce our cataloguing backlog.
- Improvements in physical access arrangements and adaptations to services for users with disabilities have been put in place at all our record offices and are constantly under review. We continue to hold regular consultation with service users on physical access issues both verbally and by regular surveys
- Our regular microfilming programme ensures that we are able to provide microfiche copies of many series of archives at each of our record office so facilitating wide access to popular resources for research.
- We support the work of our parent authorities towards the Equality Standard for Local Government

### ***Remote access for distance users***

- We provide online access to information about archive collections through our catalogue database, Gateway to the Past and by contributing catalogues to A2A (Access to Archives).
- We continue to develop and enhance the online catalogue by improving its searchability
- Our website provides up to date information about our services and events as well as many features such as the Archive Discovery Zone. The web site is continually reviewed for accuracy of content and accessibility.
- We provide online access to archive content through specific websites such as *Staffordshire Places* and *Staffordshire Views*
- Many of our publications providing information about our holdings such as parish registers and maps are available online to download freely.
- Many of our exhibitions can also be viewed online.
- We answer enquiries about our collections and about using the service by post, email or telephone
- We offer a wide range of options for the provision of copies of documents and we will provide copies of documents, subject to the terms of the Copyright Acts and our preservation policy
- We provide research services for people who cannot visit in person to carry out their own research.
- We have developed a web content strategy to provide the future direction for development of archival content on our website

### **Audience development**

- We offer a wide ranging programme of talks for local and community groups and organisations, delivering on average 40 talks a year all over the County
- We provide information about our talks to a wide range of organisations, including non-heritage or cultural organisations
- We have developed a new programme of rural roadshows which takes the Archive Service out to rurally isolated areas of the County
- We have developed a successful template for the delivery of community-based reminiscence projects, working in partnership with other cultural domains
- We aim to support events organised by other organisations, including non-heritage organisations, across the County

- We have an annual exhibition programme to provide exhibitions and displays at a variety of public venues
- The Archive Discovery Zone on our website is designed to stimulate new interest in archives through the provision of featured documents, featured collections and talking points.
- Many of our exhibitions are accessible online to a non-archive using, world-wide audience
- Our newsletter, *From Time 2 Time*, has a wide and increasing circulation
- Where budgets permit, we advertise in media and locations with a very wide and free public circulation
- The Friends of Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archives play an important advocacy and promotional role for the service
- Our publications programme includes promotional items which are produced for wider audiences than traditional archive users
- We encourage and support media use of archives whether through television, radio or the press

## **Learning**

### *Supporting The National Curriculum*

- We provide courses and information for teachers on archive sources and the use of the online catalogue
- We provide on – site facilities for working groups from schools in a safe and supported environment
- We have developed a range of out of school study subject-based projects enabling pupils and students to enjoy using original documents
- We work directly with teachers to produce teaching aids and to develop online content for educational application
- We work closely with the Schools Improvement Division of Staffordshire County Council to focus our provision on the needs of the National Curriculum
- Wherever possible we maintain existing links with local schools and seek to develop new ones to ensure that we can meet the needs of teachers and pupils

### *Higher education*

- We provide undergraduate work placements for students from Staffordshire University and Keele University
- We support the Local History Certificate and MA courses in at the University of Keele by facilitating and supporting classes at the Staffordshire Record Office

- Specialist advice on archive sources for students and tutors from the higher education sector is provided

### *Lifelong Learning*

- Through our public services, we support self- directed learning and the pursuit of family and local history for informal learning
- We have developed Making the Most of Your Archive Service, a series of free short sessions for users of the service
- We provide an annual programme of innovative activities for learning and leisure, which encourage engagement and interaction with archives
- We have developed strong partnerships with the Victoria County History and the Historic Environment Team for the provision of annual learning activities
- We provide on – site facilities for use by adult education learning groups

### *Volunteer Scheme*

- Through our volunteer scheme, we have developed opportunities for people to work on archive projects at all our record offices and at home to enhance access to archives, while also developing new skills and wider knowledge for volunteers
- We look for new ways of developing different aspects of volunteer working which can support the research of other bodies.
- We recognise and acknowledge publicly and value the contribution made by all our volunteers