



Durham County Record Office

# Appraisal Policy 2021 to 2024

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## **Appraisal Policy**

### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 Our appraisal policy exists to ensure that we preserve permanently as archives only those records of evidential and historical value to County Durham and Darlington. It should be read alongside our other policies, in particular our Collecting Policy and our Deaccessioning Policy.

### **2. Context**

- 2.1 Durham County Record Office is the statutory local authority archive service for County Durham. We also act under agreement as the archive authority for Darlington Borough Council and as the Durham Diocesan Record Office for Parish Records. DCRO is an Accredited Archive Service and appointed as a place of deposit for public records by The National Archives.

- 2.2 Our mission statement:

Durham County Record Office collects, conserves, secures and makes accessible historical records relating to County Durham and Darlington to enable learning and education, business operations, local accountability, and personal enrichment.

### **3. Scope**

- 3.1 This policy applies to all records managed by our service, both analogue and digital: Durham County Council (DCC) and Darlington Borough Council (DBC) corporate records and records offered to us as potential archives by other organisations or individuals.

### **4. Policy Principles**

- 4.1 We preserve archives because of the enduring value of the information they contain or as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator. This important evidential role of archives supports research and the operational efficiency of organisations. What we preserve is unique and therefore irreplaceable.
- 4.2 We undertake the collection, preservation and provision of access to archives following professional principles and ethical guidance.
- 4.3 We accept collections for permanent preservation following our Collecting Policy. We appraise the content of collections, assessing the cultural and informational value of the material, deciding what is archival material and worthy of retention in the archive. Following this appraisal, we formally accession archives into the collection. We take disposal decisions with great care, following The National Archives Deaccessioning and Disposal Guide 2015.

- 4.4 We use a range of appraisal criteria, including who created and used the records and why (their 'provenance'), the size and complexity of the records, how much unique information they contain and their known or potential research interest.
- 4.5 We consult with the record owner about how we will dispose of any unwanted records. We keep a record of the appraisal work we carry out.

## **5. Policy requirements**

### **5.1 Appraising corporate records**

5.1.1 We appraise DCC and DBC records subject to retention periods agreed with the services, and when a service no longer needs the records. We appraise the records to identify whether there is any material of historical and evidential relevance worthy of permanent retention as part of the DCC or DBC corporate archive.

5.1.2 We identify some corporate records of enduring value as archives at the point they are created (for example council minutes).

### **5.2 Appraising other records offered to Durham County Record Office (either as long-term loans, gifts or to purchase)**

When we are first offered records, depending on their size and complexity, we may only be able to make a basic appraisal by assessing whether the records fit with our Collecting Policy. We identify and remove obvious ephemera, removing duplicate or blank/unused records. We carry out a full appraisal when we examine, sort and list records in detail (the cataloguing stage).

### **5.3 In all cases, we will consider the following factors:**

- Whether the archives are controlled by legislation or regulation.
- Whether certain records have an extraordinary quality about them and therefore are more likely to be requested in the future (for example major surveys and projects; major legal cases and investigations; major controversies).
- The value of draft and working papers (for example, some early drafts may provide evidence of creative development, but for administrative and business archives it may be sufficient to preserve only a final report).
- Whether a record is an original or unique copy (for example sealed orders and agreements and signed minutes of major committees).
- Whether the records reveal a significant change in policy or the structure of an organisation or business (for example, papers relating to major local government reorganisation; local business mergers; changes in an organisation's constitution).

- Whether similar records have had a major impact on research and investigations in the past (for example, social care records relating to children and vulnerable adults).
- Whether the records fill significant gaps in our collections (for example from under-represented communities, unheard voices).
- Whether the records fit better in the collections of another archive service.
- Whether the records give insight into how an issue of national importance was dealt with at a local level.
- Whether any personal bias is affecting our decision to keep or destroy particular records (we will consult other staff to reach a considered judgement).
- The overall quality of the unique information held by the records.

#### 5.4 Disposal

5.4.1 We will dispose of items in accordance with legislation and in agreement with the donor/depositor.

5.4.2 Disposal will follow our Collecting Policy and will be by return, transfer to another repository, use for training or teaching purposes, or by confidential destruction.

### 6. Standards

6.1 See Appendix 2 for statutory position.

6.2 At the cataloguing stage, we assess the overall evidential and historical value of the records using:

- Guidelines published by The National Archives to appraise public records as defined by the Public Records Act 1958. These include records of magistrates and coroners courts and the National Health Service. DCRO is the recognised place of deposit for public records relating to County Durham and Darlington.
- Guidelines published by lead professionals (the Information and Records Management Society and the Archives and Records Association) to appraise records created by local government, schools and businesses.
- Other nationally recognised best practice guidelines, such as The Church of England's records management guides for parish and diocesan records.
- Guidelines developed in-house for appraising records created by private individuals, families, societies and businesses.

## **7. Roles and responsibilities**

- 7.1 DCC Corporate Management Team is responsible for approving the corporate framework for the preservation of semi-current and archival records as set out in this policy.
- 7.2 DCC Corporate Directors are responsible for developing service guidance for the preservation of semi-current and archival records.
- 7.3 DCC Heads of Services are responsible for ensuring that appropriate resources are in place to enable compliance with the Appraisal Policy.
- 7.4 Individual Employees are responsible for the records they create and will follow service guidance for the preservation of semi-current and archival records. DCC owns the information that individual employees create.
- 7.5 The County Archivist is responsible for DCRO's Appraisal Policy, and will provide guidance and support to services and elected members in order to support its aims.
- 7.6 The Appraisal Policy will apply to records created by Elected Members as part of their Council work.

## **8. Communication**

- 8.1 The Appraisal Policy will be published on the DCRO website.

## **9. Audit**

- 9.1 DCRO will develop procedures to enable the effective monitoring of the Appraisal Policy.

## **10. Risk Management**

- 10.1 Without a policy and procedures to manage appraisal, there are a series of risks:
  - Disposing of significant archives, irretrievable loss of historically important records.
  - Accusations of poor management and/or bias in decision-making. Archive services should record all their decisions and provide an approved audit trail for these decisions so they can show they followed agreed policy, and demonstrate professional judgement and accountability in managing archival collections.
  - Attracting bad public relations and damage to reputation. Archive services should consider the impact of their disposal decisions on their reputation. In particular, depositors and donors may make different

donation decisions if they think there is a risk of items being disposed of later.

- Trust. Archive services that do not manage the appraisal and disposal process efficiently and ethically, risk losing the support of their community. This community includes a range of stakeholders including users, depositors and funders. Improper disposal can damage the relationship between a funder and an archive service, risking future funding.
- The role of individual archive staff and managers. Without agreed policy and procedures, approved by top management external to the archive service, individuals risk accusations of poor decision-making and even illegal activity or fraud.

## **11. Review**

We will review this policy every three years.

## **12. Contacts**

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## Appendix 1: Glossary

**Archive:** a group of records created by an organisation or individual in the course of daily activities but no longer needed by them for regular reference. The individual records in an archive can vary in format but each is a combination of a medium and the information recorded on or in it; for example single sheets of paper with typed or handwritten text, maps, bound volumes, photographic negatives and prints, audio-visual recordings and digital documents/files.

**Accessioning:** the process of bringing archives under the intellectual and custodial control of a preservation environment.

**Appraisal:** the process of deciding whether an item or group of items has continuing value in accordance with the collecting organisation's mission statement.

**Retrospective appraisal:** appraisal of collections or items where evidence of previous appraisal to an approved standard is not apparent.

**Disposal:** the physical act of transferring the collection or item from the archive service to another destination. This covers transfer to another repository, return to depositor or donor and, as a last resort, destruction.

## **Appendix 2: Statutory Position and Standards**

Durham County Council has a statutory duty to provide an archives service, to preserve and make accessible archives in whatever format they may be created.

Relevant legislation:

- Public Records Act 1958
- Local Government (Records) Act 1962
- Local Government Act 1972
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Environmental Information Regulations Act 2004
- Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978
- The Law of Property (Amendment) Act 1924
- The Manorial Documents Rules 1926
- The Tithe (Copies of Instruments of Appropriation) Rules 1960

Standards play an important role in appraisal. Standards that are relevant to the management of all archives:

- Archive Service Accreditation Standard 2013
- British Standard for archive storage BS 4971:2017
- Information and Records Management Society Retention guidelines for Local Authorities 2003