Tasglann nan Eilean

Archive

Tasglann nan Eilean Access and Engagement Policy

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Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

1. Introduction
This Policy is one of a suite of documents governing the service provided by Tasglann nan Eilean, the archive service of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. The Policy defines the principles under which access to the collections and services of Tasglann nan Eilean is provided.

This Policy has been prepared to comply with the local authority's obligations to properly preserve and manage its records under the Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011 and in accordance with best practice as set down by the National Council on Archives Public Services Quality Group's *A Standard for Access to Archives* (2008).

It must however be recognised that the environment in which the archive service is operating at this juncture means that the aims laid out in this Policy are highly ambitious, given the following circumstances:

- the cyber attack on Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in November 2023 resulted in the loss of access to our collections database and to decades of cataloguing work, which has a severely detrimental effect on the provision of access
- the resources allocated to the archive service make it extremely challenging to deliver the service to the standards aspired to, as laid out below.

2. Purpose
The **purpose** of Tasglann nan Eilean (the archive service) is to identify, collect and permanently preserve:

(i) the records of the Comhairle and its predecessor bodies which need to be retained permanently for legal or historical reasons
(ii) the archives of organisations, businesses, estates or individuals connected to the Outer Hebrides which have been gifted or deposited

and to make these accessible to the widest extent possible for research, education or enjoyment.

Tasglann nan Eilean manages to professional standards the historical records which have been entrusted to its care, to ensure they are documented and preserved for future generations. The archives provide a unique insight into the historical development of the Outer Hebrides, recording the activities, people and events which have shaped the islands. They are therefore a valuable and irreplaceable resource.

3. Definitions of Terms used in the Policy

Archive service
Tasglann nan Eilean is the archive service of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and has an island-wide responsibility for public records of enduring value created by the Comhairle and its predecessors.

Archives
Original records which have been selected for permanent preservation because of their continuing enduring value.

Depositor
A person or organisation that transfers custody of historical records to the archive service.

Community
For the purposes of this Policy, this refers to residents of the Outer Hebrides, as well as others with a research interest in the Outer Hebrides, whether or not they visit the archive in person, and whether or not they currently use the service.

User
Any person who uses the archive service.

Researcher
Any person using the contents of the archive specifically for research.

Stakeholders
Persons or groups with an interest in the present and future activities of the archive service, including Comhairle nan Eilean Siar members and staff, organisations which have awarded funding or grants to the service, local residents, current and future service users, depositors and potential depositors of archives.

4. Equality of Opportunities Statement
Tasglann nan Eilean is committed to supporting the ambitions of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to:

- advance equality of opportunity
- strive to create and maintain an environment whereby people from all backgrounds can live and work together harmoniously by challenging unlawful or unfair discrimination, prejudice, stereotyping, harassment and undignified or disrespectful behaviour
- provide everyone with an equal opportunity to live, work and learn free from discrimination and victimisation, including those who experience poverty and social disadvantage.

We promote equality and accessibility in everything we do.

We strive to be inclusive and value difference.

This means that:
- We ensure that all our staff understand their responsibility to promote equality and diversity and to challenge inappropriate behaviour in order to create an environment and culture that treats everyone with dignity and respect
- We work to ensure that our collections and services are relevant and accessible to all communities
- We strive to reach audiences that in the past have been under-represented in our activities
- We want our service users to feel supported and welcome when they interact with us.

4. Key Principles
A key objective of the archive service is to ensure that collections and services are available to the wider community.

The service understands that access to collections relies on effective catalogues and its approach is set out in a separate Documentation Policy.

Tasglann nan Eilean shall:
- provide access to the archives in its care as effectively and efficiently as possible, taking account of available resources;
- aim to serve all of its community, devising a range of services appropriate to the community's stated or implied needs;
- aim to encourage as much access by researchers and users to original archives as is compatible with the permanent preservation of unique and irreplaceable material;
- provide access to the community on an equitable basis, within available resources, and in compliance with the Equality Act 2010;
- consult, and be responsive to, the needs of the community, users and stakeholders in developing future plans for the service;

- align with and support the Comhairle's Gaelic plan and Customer Care standards in delivering the archive service;
- take due account of relevant legislation and ethical codes in implementing the provisions of this Policy, including the Data Protection Act 2018, the Public Records Scotland Act 2011, Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004, Equality Act 2010, Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994; Copyright, Designs & Patents Act 1988, Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015.

5. Access provisions

- The archive service will provide free access to its holdings in the public reading room facility of Tasglann nan Eilean by appointment, Monday to Friday 9.30am to 5pm.
- The service will provide suitable conditions and facilities for viewing original archival material and secondary sources of various media.
- The service will provide a suitable level of search-room staff, trained in customer care, to:
    - provide advice and guidance in how to use the guides and catalogues
    - provide assistance in identifying relevant sources
    - help service users order documents and give guidance on handling techniques
    - explain how to obtain copies (including with personal camera equipment).
- The service will retrieve archive material for users on request during appointments.
- The service will require all users to sign the reading room register indicating that they will abide by the reading room rules on display.
- Information about opening hours, how to access the archives and the ways in which the archive service can be contacted is provided via the archive service's website and information leaflets.
- Information about the archive service is available in directories such as Discovery (an online gateway to archive repositories in the UK maintained by The National Archives) and the Scottish Council on Archives' website.
- Reading room rules and procedures, aimed at protecting unique archive material, are clearly displayed, and qualified or trained staff are on hand to assist researchers in the use and interpretation of archive material.
- The service will publish up-to-date information about its collections, including catalogues, online. Catalogues are also available in hard-copy format in the reading room.
- The archive service aims to make archive content available to the community through exhibitions, websites, social media, events, presentations, projects and education activities, as well as by direct access.
- The archive service will respond to written or telephone enquiries from users who prefer to access the service remotely, or are unable to visit the reading room in person, with information about our collections and advice on how to access them.
- The archive service aims to support the work of local history societies, schools, higher education institutions and community groups to use archive sources in support of their activities.
- Digitised copies of archive material will be made available via the archive service's website or other platforms if staffing resource is available to permit this.
- Where original archive material is held in Comhairle libraries, access will be provided under the supervision of a member of staff of the library, and the same rules and procedures will apply as in the archive reading room.

6. Enquiry Service

Enquiries will be fully responded to within 20 working days, in compliance with the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

- The archive service offers a paid research service for users who would like information checked within the records. Charges are defined in the Heritage Service Pricing Policy.
- Enquiries will be retained in a datastore to enable gathering of performance statistics.

7. Reprographic Service
Users are permitted to take digital photographs of archive documents without flash, for research purposes, provided that there are no copyright or other restrictions and that they complete and sign a copy order form, including copyright declaration.

The archive service will provide copies of archive material on request to remote enquirers, for the relevant fee, provided there are no restrictions as a result of copyright, condition issues or other restrictions imposed by the owner of the material and that the enquirer has completed and signed a copy order form, including copyright declaration.

Information about the charges which apply for this service can be found on the archive service's website.

8. Access Restrictions
Whilst access to the records held is as unrestricted as possible, the provision of access must be balanced against preservation, security and legal requirements, and the rights of owners of archives.

- Access will not generally be granted to Archives which are classed as Closed.
- Archives will be classed 'Closed' for one of the following reasons:
    - There is a legal reason, for example to protect the privacy of individuals where records fall under the Data Protection Act 2018
    - The depositor of the records has placed specific conditions on access for commercial or privacy reasons, as part of a Depositor Agreement
    - The records are subject to an exemption under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002
    - The archives are in a fragile physical condition and need to be closed for preservation reasons
    - The records are not listed. Unlisted or partly-listed records will only be available at the discretion of the Archivist. Every attempt will be made to produce a summary listing of each collection within 3 months of it being received to enable some level of access.
- Occasionally it will not be possible to grant access to archives due to unavailability. This will usually happen as a result of them being on loan to another institution, on display at Museum & Taglann nan Eilean, or receiving conservation treatment.
- Where surrogate copies are available these will be issued to users instead of originals to prevent wear and tear on the original documents.
- Exceptions can be made to allow access to records Closed under the Data Protection Act 2018 in particular circumstances specified in the legislation. Where application is made for access to Closed records, the procedures will be explained to the applicant, and access will be at the discretion of the Archivist provided a signed agreement is in place, indicating compliance with certain conditions.
- Users of original archive material have a responsibility to comply with reading room regulations. Any breach may result in access being withdrawn.

9. Widening access
- The service will work to increase and promote awareness of its collections and services, and to engage the community through:
    - online channels such as the website, blog and social media
    - contributing to events and exhibitions as part of the wider heritage service
    - participating in partnership projects, activities or events.
- The service will seek to develop, understand and evaluate its audiences through regular user surveys as part of the wider heritage service.

10. Loans
Requests for loans of original archive material by other institutions for exhibition use will be considered in accordance with our Loans Policy.

11. Related Policies

- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Archives Policy
- Tasglann nan Eilean Collections Development Policy
- Tasglann nan Eilean Collections Documentation Policy
- Heritage Service Collections Care and Conservation Policy
- Tasglann nan Eilean Loans Policy

12. Policy Review
This policy will be reviewed every 5 years, or earlier if required in response to changes in legislation.