Tasglann nan Eilean

Archive

Tasglann nan Eilean Collections Information Policy

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Document History

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Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

This Policy has been updated so far as possible in light of the cyber attack which occurred on Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in November 2023.

1. Introduction

The purpose of Tasglann nan Eilean, as the archive service of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, is to identify, collect and preserve the records of the Comhairle and its predecessor bodies which need to be retained permanently for legal or historical reasons, as well as 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.

2. Policy objectives

Tasglann nan Eilean recognises that good documentation of its collections, through accessioning, cataloguing and other activities is fundamental to effective collections management and enabling public access.

2.1 History of collections documentation

The archive service began in 2010 as a three year project funded by the European Regional Development Fund. In November 2013, it became part of the heritage service of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. Archive material received directly since 2010 had generally been well documented to recognised archival standards. Since the cyber attack of November 2023, the full accessions documentation is available in paper format only. The digital accession records are contained in the CALM collections database which is not currently accessible.

There is a small quantity of material held for which no accessions or transfer documentation can be traced, making it difficult to establish the terms on which it was initially deposited. This is chiefly material which had previously been held for many years elsewhere in the Comhairle and which was not fully documented at the time of transfer.

A collections database – Axiell CALM - was procured in April 2017. Work had been undertaken to customise the database modules and import data with a view to streamlining documentation processes. The database is not currently accessible.

Prior to April 2017, catalogues were created as hard-copy documents and on an ICA-Atom database, and made available online via the Tasglann nan Eilean Siar website, whilst accessions were recorded in an in-house database. Many, but not all, of the catalogues are still available as hard-copy documents in the reading room. The online ICA-Atom database is now accessible from the new website [insert link]. However it was in the process of being replaced by the CALM database, which has more functionality, and was not therefore being updated due to lack of staff resource. The fully up to date catalogue in CALM is currently inaccessible as a result of the cyber attack.

2.2 Accessions

2.2.1 Accessioning is the process of capturing information about acquisitions as they are transferred into the care of the archive service. The purpose is to record important information about the archive's provenance, history and ownership. Tasglann nan Eilean

aims to accurately document key information about the material acquired - its nature and contents, the identity of the person or body transferring the archives into its custody, and the terms on which it is to hold the records- in an accessions database as soon as practicable after arrival and certainly within one month of receipt. The digital accession records are contained in the CALM collections database which has not been accessible since November 2023. An Excel spreadsheet has been set up as an interim measure to record brief information about all accessions 2010-2023 (input retrospectively from paper forms), and any further accessions received since November 2023, but it is not as detailed as the information previously held in the database.

2.2.2 Tasglann nan Eilean will make every effort to establish the ownership and legal status of archive material offered at the time of transfer to the archive service.

2.2.3 Tasglann nan Eilean will ensure that all accessions are accompanied by a signed Deposit Agreement Form.

2.3 Cataloguing

2.3.1 Tasglann nan Eilean had set an aim in 2017 to have at least 75% of its holdings fully catalogued to *General International Standard of Archival Description* (ISAD(G)) standards at any one time. This has not been possible to deliver due to the lack of staff and the volume of new material having been transferred to the archive. It is not possible to set a new target at time of writing until the outcome of the post-cyber attack data recovery efforts are known.

2.3.2 The archive service aims to provide collection-level descriptions of most of its holdings and to make this information available online and in the reading room, in line with its remit to provide the widest possible access to the archives collections in its care.

2.3.3 A documentation plan identifying priorities for in-depth cataloguing to item level, and the resource available for such tasks, will be drawn up annually as part of the service's business planning process.

2.3.4 Tasglann nan Eilean will use the following standards in addition to ISAD(G) as appropriate:

- National Council on Archives: Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate names;
- ISAAR (CPF): International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate bodies, Persons and Families;
- UKAT (UK Archival Thesaurus) for subject indexing

2.3.5 Cataloguing Guidelines which conform to the above standards for use by staff and others involved in cataloguing are available, to ensure that consistency and quality are maintained.

2.4 Strategy for dealing with legacy issues and backlog

2.4.1 The most significant legacy issue currently facing the service is the impact of the cyber attack which occurred in November 2023. Tasglann nan Eilean will address this by working with IT and others to recover the data needed to underpin delivery of an effective Archive Service. Specifically, Tasglann nan Eilean will:

- Establish the extent of data it is possible to recover to enable firm data recovery plan to be created

- Continue to rebuild information resources on Sharepoint in the interim where possible, drawing on available data
- Re-establish access to Axiell CALM catalogue system for archive staff and investigate migration of CALM to cloud-based system
- Assess extent of catalogue data to be imported or recreated in CALM, including data currently in legacy systems and create Documentation Plan to address
- Investigate most effective method of making archive catalogues available online
- Re-establish reading room library database by recreating catalogue records in Excel as an interim solution
- Establish processes for digital preservation to ensure permanent preservation of archives in digital format

2.4.2 Tasglann nan Eilean will attempt to establish the circumstances under which material was deposited with Tasglann nan Eilean and discover its provenance in cases where there is limited transfer documentation or for archive material held which is unaccessioned.

2.4.3 Tasglann nan Eilean will put documentation work plans in place to deal with collections which are not catalogued or only partially catalogued in order to minimise the proportion of uncatalogued archive material held.

2.4.4 Tasglann nan Eilean will pursue grant funding in order to deliver specific cataloguing projects for which the service does not have resource available.

2.5 Finding aids and catalogue enhancement

2.5.1 Tasglann nan Eilean will take account of user demand and feedback in developing additional finding aids to facilitate access to the collections beyond catalogues, such as source or subject guides.

2.5.2 The archive service will, where appropriate, create opportunities for volunteers to work on projects to enhance the catalogues by creating indexes or transcripts.

3. Systems for recording information

3.1 Archive acccessions were initially documented in a Microsoft Access database, created in 2010. An archive accessions database was then developed in-house by the Comhairle's IT service in 2016, and the data imported from the Access database as an interim measure prior to the decision to purchase Axiell CALM.

3.2 Following the purchase of Axiell CALM in April 2017, the Accessions and Depositors database modules were customised, and all relevant data covering accessions from 2010-2017 was imported, to enable full searchability and the linking of the accessions, depositors and catalogue databases to make full use of the functionality offered by CALM.

3.3 Since the successful accessions data import in 2017, all subsequent accessions from 2018-2023 had been entered in the CALM database as and when archive collections were received.

3.4 Signed archive transfer forms and accompanying correspondence and information relating to accessions are held in an accessions filing system in paper format.

3.5 An online database (ICA-Atom) had been used for archive catalogue data pre-2014, and hosted via the Tasglann nan Eilean Siar website which was a legacy of the initial project.

3.6 The ICA-Atom database was in process of being phased out as it is a longer-term goal to make the CALM catalogue available directly online. Although the data is out of date, the ICA-Atom database is still currently available via the new Outer Hebrides Heritage Services website as the new CALM database was not ready for launch at the time the website was launched.

3.7 Steady progress was being made with importing or creating catalogue data in CALM prior to the cyber attack. This is not currently accessible.

3.8 Many interim box lists and draft catalogues of work in progress had been created in Excel or Word and were saved on the network drive. This is not currently accessible due to the cyber attack.

3.9 Locations of all items are currently recorded on an Excel spreadsheet.

4. Protecting collections information

4.1 Information which had been held in online systems on network drives (CALM, in-house databases and spreadsheets) were regularly backed up. Unfortunately the back-ups were also seized in the cyber attack.

4.2 Only authorised members of Tasglann nan Eilean staff had access to Axiell CALM and to the relevant shared drives.

4.3 Paper records such as the accessions files are retained in a locked fire-proof filing cabinet.

5. Policy Review

This Policy will be reviewed again in 12 months as there are currently many uncertainties surrounding the issues it covers.