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Ref. No.	
Category (Y/N)	
People	
Place	Y
Corporate	
In Constitution	

Archives Access Policy

Policy Details

What is this policy for?	This policy provides a framework for the Joint Archive Service based at Dorset History Centre in providing access to collections onsite, off-site and online along with activities, community opportunities and social media communications.
Who does this policy affect?	Everyone with an interest in archives relating to Dorset.
Keywords	archives, Dorset History Centre, access
Author	Sam Johnston, Service Manager for Archives, Dorset History Centre archives@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk
Dorset Council policy adopted from	This policy applies across the Dorset Council and Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council areas.
Does this policy relate to any laws?	Freedom of Information Act 2000 Data Protection Act Equalities Act 2010
Is this policy linked to any other Dorset Council policies?	All policies relating to archives are available on the Dorset History Centre website .
Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)	An EQIA was completed for this policy in 2022. This delivered a positive review of the Joint Archive Service's attempts to provide access for all, but it also highlighted some areas where further work was required.
Other Impact Assessments	None

Status and Approvals

Status	Live	Version	Current
Last review date	June 2023	Next review date	June 2026
Member/ Partnership Board Approval	Joint Archives Advisory Board	Date approved	2023

The Joint Archives Service Access Policy can be found on the [Dorset History Centre website](#)

Access Policy

September 2023

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Service Description

The **Joint Archives Service** (JAS), based at **Dorset History Centre** (DHC) is operated on behalf of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council, and Dorset Council. Partnership between the two authorities as delivered through the joint service sits at the heart of JAS activities and underwrites the protocols and processes by which DHC acquires material. This is enshrined in the 2022 Inter-Authority on Archives which was approved by the Cabinets of both councils.

Local history services (primarily local studies library material) are provided locally at **Poole History Centre** and **Bournemouth Library's Heritage Zone** respectively.

DHC is the sole local authority archive within the county with Accredited status as conferred by The National Archives. Local studies library services and the Historic Environment Record are operated on behalf of Dorset Council.

Our Vision

That Dorset History Centre is the physical and virtual hub for the archival and recorded heritage of the county of Dorset in both hard copy and digital formats.

Our Mission

To acquire, preserve and make accessible the archives of the county of Dorset and so promote cultural, economic, educational and social well-being.

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The JAS is a publicly funded archive service. It was established as Dorset Record Office in 1955 with three key purposes: the acquisition of important archival material relating to the wider county of Dorset, including Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, its preservation and the provision of access to that material by the public. These three core functions remain.
- 1.2 Dorset History Centre (DHC) makes this material accessible to visitors onsite as well as providing worldwide access online; through a range of off-site activities; and via an enquiry service and the provision of digitised material as appropriate. DHC offers on- and off-site learning and participation opportunities.
- 1.3 The service holds over 10,000 separate collections with well over 100 new collections added every year. Archive material held at DHC dates to 965; material consists of documents, maps, plans, photographs, film and sound.
- 1.4 These records are used by a wide variety of people and for a variety of reasons. This includes not only leisure pursuits such as family history but also educational, official and legal purposes.
- 1.5 The JAS provides access in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act, 2000 and the General Data Protection Regulation, 2018. As a result, in a small minority of cases, there will be restrictions on access to records which contain sensitive

personal information e.g., coroner's courts or hospital records.

- 1.6 Some materials may be unsuitable for public viewing due to their fragile condition. Wherever possible it would be the intention of the JAS to make these items available in digital surrogate form instead.
- 1.7 Some records may have a 'closure' period which was negotiated with the depositor when they were at the point of transferred to DHC. It would always be the preference of the service to try and reach an accommodation between the need for confidentiality where it exists and a genuine request for information from a member of the public.

2. Aim and Purpose

- 2.1 This policy provides a framework for the JAS in providing access to collections onsite, off-site and online. It is intended to support the service's commitment to opening up the archive collections to as many people as possible, both current users and new audiences.

3. Scope

- 3.1 Access applies equally and inclusively to archives and local studies library material.
- 3.2 All staff at DHC work to promote access to the collections held by the service. This includes providing a warm welcome and help with enquiries, listing material so it can be found through the online catalogue and providing material in digital format.
- 3.3 The service undertakes cataloguing, conservation, and digital preservation to underpin its work in preserving and making accessible hard copy archives. For more information please see the Collections Care and Conservation Policy (2023) and the Digital Preservation Policy (2023).
- 3.4 Access to the collections is also provided through the community outreach and learning activities of the service in accordance with the Learning and Public Engagement Policy (2023).

4. Equality and Diversity

- 4.1 The JAS completed an Equalities Impact Assessment in 2022 which has been published online. In essence this delivered a positive review of the JAS's attempts to provide access for all, but it also highlighted some areas where further work was required.
- 4.2 The JAS is aware that some people may find it harder to access our collections due to their location, income, level of education, personal needs or cultural experience. The service is working towards improved representation of excluded groups in our collections, and fosters partnerships with community groups who have connections with new audiences.

5. Access on-site

- 5.1 The DHC building is broadly compliant with the Equalities Act, 2010. It has wide level access doorways including through automatic doors at the main entrance, and audio loop systems at reception desks and in the Lecture Room, an accessible toilet and a lift to the first floor.
- 5.2 A team of fully trained and welcoming staff are available to assist the public in identifying the most suitable potential sources for their research. Support is provided for using the onsite computers and advice on handling the documents and carrying out research is also available. We have a large key keyboard computer and an electronic magnification device for people with visual impairment or low vision; and height adjustable work desks to aid customers with movement limitations. Staff receive training in supporting people with less visible disabilities and

active outreach aims to provide opportunities for a wide range of abilities and backgrounds.

5.3 In addition to personal visits, staff deal with enquiries by telephone, post and email.

5.4 The JAS welcomes feedback on its performance and any suggestions as to how we might improve the service for customers. We provide customer feedback forms and participate in the Archives and Records Association surveys of archive users run by CIPFA, as well as welcoming comments in person or via email.

5.5 Access to archives at DHC is free. DHC is a member of the Archives and Records Association's Archives Card scheme and those users wishing to view original documents need to register. Access to the local studies library and the family history sources (microform, transcripts and Public Access computers) does not require any form of registration.

5.6 Access to collections information is presented in both hard-copy catalogues available in the searchroom and online, along with guides to particular types of record or areas of research.

6. Access off-site

6.1 In accordance with the Learning and Outreach Policy (2023) the JAS provides talks, workshops, and training within our capacity, to encourage the understanding and enjoyment of archives.

6.2 The JAS supports a range of organisations in project work and grant applications. The service values collaborative activities and welcomes opportunities for partnership working across Bournemouth, Christchurch, Dorset and Poole.

6.3 Off-site activities include talks, exhibitions, workshops, work with community groups as well as schools and colleges and project activities such as oral history training and research support.

7. Access online

7.1 The JAS provides worldwide access to a large quantity of its family history resources via Ancestry.co.uk. Access to this resource is free on-site at DHC and Dorset's other public libraries.

7.2 The JAS provides free online access to the catalogues of its collections. The online catalogue is hosted on the Dorset Council website. As cataloguing of the material is undertaken these are regularly updated.

7.3 DHC will continue to increase digital resources and aim over time to make more collections-related material (both catalogues and content) available online. Material from collections will be digitised in accordance with the Digitisation Policy (2023).

7.4 The JAS features on Dorset Council's website with pages that provide information on how to access and use the service along with guides to particular types of record or areas of research. The web pages and social media are used to showcase interesting aspects of the collection and to raise the profile of the service.

8. Volunteers

8.1 The JAS recruits volunteers who are a vital form of additional capacity and expertise within the JAS's range of activities. Volunteers at DHC learn skills and work within a sociable context and the JAS benefits from their input. The service provides support for a limited number of volunteers with additional needs.

8.2 The JAS is also supported by the Dorset Archives Trust (DAT). This charitable body carries out

fundraising to support projects, assist with collections management and provides financial support to volunteers.

- 8.3 Dorset Archives Trust also holds events which relate to the collections held at DHC to raise awareness of the service.

9. Review of the Policy

- 9.1 The policy will be reviewed in consultation with interested organisations, stakeholders and individuals every 3 years to take into account any new legislation, regulations, guidance, or business practices. The date for the next review of the policy will be September 2026.

10. Further information or comment

- 10.1 Copies of this policy are available in large print.
- 10.2 To comment on this policy or for further information about it, contact the Service Manager for Archives and Records at:

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