

Bath Record Office: Archives and Local Studies **Collections Care & Conservation Policy**

1. POLICY FRAMEWORK

1.1 Mission Statement

Bath Record Office: Archives and Local Studies collects and keeps safe archives and local studies collections relating to Bath & North East Somerset and its people, it provides access to archives and local studies materials, promoting them for the benefit of the community, and it is the permanent home of the Council's archive.

1.2 Statutory and legal status

Bath Record Office: Archives and Local Studies is the authorised archive service for the custody of the official records of Bath & North East Somerset Council and its predecessor authorities under the Local Government Act, 1972.

It is an approved 'Place of Deposit' under the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967 for a number of classes of Central Government records held locally (Public Records).

It has been empowered to acquire archives by deposit, gift or purchase and to preserve and make them available under The Local Government (Records) Act, 1962 (c.56). Section 4 of this Act also permits the allocation of resources to persons looking after such archives.

1.3 Council Corporate Strategy

The Council's Corporate Strategy priorities are to:

- Address the climate emergency
- Prepare for the future
- Deliver for local residents
- Focus on prevention
- Give people a bigger say

1.4 Service aims

Bath Record Office: Archives and Local Studies forms part of Heritage Services under the Economy & Growth Directorate of Bath & North East Somerset Council. Heritage Services' statement of purpose is 'For learning, inspiration and enjoyment', which informs its aims:

- to enhance the quality of life for residents of Bath & North East Somerset
- to maximise public enjoyment of the Council's world class heritage
- to enable people to learn from the activities and achievements of past and present societies
- to promote understanding and appreciation of different cultures
- to contribute to the district's economic prosperity through our Business Plan

2. PURPOSE

2.1 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the holdings of BRO are cared for and managed in a consistent and safe way.

2.2 BRO has a responsibility to ensure that the documents in its care can be used and enjoyed by future generations. It aims to deliver its collections care programme in cooperation with staff and users. It intends to protect and prolong the life of both physical and digital collections by addressing the risks in a consistent, efficient, cost effective and safe way.

3. SCOPE

3.1 This policy set outs a framework for mitigating the main risks and threats to the long-term survival and accessibility of the Archives and Local Studies Collections. It should be read in conjunction with the BRO Forward Plan, Collections Management Policy and Collections Care & Conservation Plan. It has written following a Benchmarks in Collections Care exercise overseen by the National Conservation Service.

3.2 This policy will cover preventive conservation, remedial conservation, emergency planning, training and procedures. For further details concerning digital records please refer to the Digital Preservation Policy for Heritage Services below.

4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

4.1 All BRO staff are required to assist in implementing the Collection Care & Conservation Policy as appropriate to their roles and responsibilities. Volunteers also play a role in certain aspects of our collections care programme.

4.2 The Collections Care & Conservation Plan is continually reviewed by the Principal Archivist with the Collections Managers and Local Studies Librarian. Advice is sought from professional conservators when necessary.

4.3 BRO does not employ a professional conservator. A project conservator has been employed on fixed-term contracts since 2018 but for work solely on grant-funded projects. It is BRO's intention to propose a business case in order to seek approval for the establishment of a full or part-time conservator who may work across Heritage Services' collections.

4.4 Conservation treatment are only undertaken by appropriately qualified conservators, or by those trained by, and under the supervision of, appropriately qualified conservators.

4.5 Preventive tasks such as providing protective enclosures may be undertaken by other staff and/or volunteers.

5. DEFINITIONS

5.1 **Preservation** is the retention and maintenance of material over time.

5.2 **Collections Care** is the management of all risks to the collections, including those from the collection items themselves and other collection items, physical forces, and all other agents of deterioration.

5.3 **Conservation** is the direct application of interventive remedial treatment and non-interventive preventive measures to stop deterioration and promote the physical preservation and accessibility of an item or collection.

6. PREVENTATIVE CONSERVATION

Buildings and security

6.1 The Archives and most of the Local Studies collections are stored in the Guildhall. The public search rooms, offices and temporary conservation studio are also located there. Overall responsibility for the building lies with Bath & North East Somerset Property Services with day-to-day maintenance and security provided by the Guildhall Maintenance team. Heritage Services' Facilities Team is responsible for the areas occupied by the Record Office. The Service maintains a high level of security for the collections stored at Guildhall. Security alarms and sensors are fitted throughout all strong rooms, search rooms and offices, with CCTV and security in operation 24 hours a day.

6.2 Collections stored at Haydon (the Council's Record Management facility) and Pixash Lane are regularly inspected (on a weekly basis) and have the same degree of security systems as for the Guildhall.

Storage and housekeeping

6.3 BRO collections are maintained in secure storage areas and where these do not meet the requirements of BS 4971 (2017) they are monitored regularly to ensure that conditions are as stable as possible. BRO implements the Collections Care & Conservation Plan with the support of Property Services and Heritage Services with regard to improvements to storage areas. Regular deep cleaning is undertaken, and a pest management programme is also in place.

6.4 An ongoing repackaging programme is delivered by all staff and some volunteers. This is informed by packaging guidelines which were drawn up in consultation with professional conservators.

6.5 BRO will continue to upgrade shelving and storage units with reference to the disposition survey and work towards providing suitable storage for photographic, film and digital media.

Handling and using records

6.6 Staff and volunteers receive appropriate training in caring for records. Staff and volunteers are instructed to follow our Collections Care Procedures and Packaging Guidelines.

6.7 Customers may access records only under supervision and are expected to comply with the published research room guidelines. Staff provide advice and appropriate book and

document supports to ensure safe handling of records. Customers may be required to consult surrogates to avoid damage to original records.

New acquisitions

6.8 Preliminary preventive measures are put in place as soon as a collection is acquired. Collections are checked for damp, mould, and insect infestation, in a specially designated area, and appropriate action taken. Collections are put in protective low acid/acid-free boxes, and outsize material is specially supported and/or wrapped in line with the Packaging Guidelines. Contaminated material will be placed in quarantine until conservation can be carried out. Condition reporting is carried out as part of the accessioning process as per the Collections Care Procedures.

Environmental monitoring and control

6.9 Temperature and relative humidity within all Guildhall strong rooms are continually monitored by Hanwell data loggers which report directly to an archivist's computer. Significant fluctuations in temperature or humidity can be investigated when automatic alerts are received by staff through a chain of command. Similarly, flood alarms are installed in all Guildhall strong rooms as part of the integrated Hanwell EMS system.

6.10 An air movement system is installed in most of the Guildhall strong rooms and its use is controlled with close reference to environmental data. BRO is committed to improving environmental conditions in line with the best practice set out in BS 4971 (2017).

Emergency planning

6.11 BRO has a comprehensive and up-to-date Disaster Plan. This is reviewed regularly and updated where necessary. Hard copy and digital copies are distributed to all relevant staff and the Council's Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Team.

Ongoing planning

6.12 Large collections or those in poor condition are treated as individually managed projects. BRO will seek external funding to support such projects. Staff and volunteers are encouraged to report any signs of damage to records. This is recorded on the CALM database. Surveys are also carried out to assess the current physical state of holdings. This data is used to inform preservation and conservation planning.

7. REMEDIAL CONSERVATION

Decision to treat

7.1 All interventive work is subject to formal approval by the Principal Archivist following a consideration of other options, risk assessments and a justification for the proposed course of action. Remedial conservation will be undertaken only when necessary, to ensure the long-term safety of vulnerable material. The decision will take into account the historical importance of the item, its condition, and the cost implications. Consideration will also be

given to the needs of the researcher and the level of use which the document is expected to sustain in the future.

Practitioners

7.2 When necessary, all remedial conservation work will be undertaken by an appropriately qualified and experienced conservator. At present, remedial conservation work is carried out by externally sourced contractors or a project conservator for records which fall under the scope of the current project.

Documentation

7.3 Before any work takes place, a mutual agreement will be reached between the Principal Archivist and the contractor with regard to the approach and the treatment of items.

7.4 A full conservation record is kept of all interventive treatment. It will be made accessible where required. It includes a description of the materials and structure of the object prior to treatment, an assessment of its condition including the results of any diagnostic tests, a consideration of the options for treatment as appropriate, and a report of all treatments carried out and all chemicals, materials, and processes used.

7.5 Project conservators record conservation treatments and link these to the CALM catalogue.

8. STANDARDS

8.1 The Collections Care & Conservation Policy is underpinned by the following standards and methodologies:

- BS 4971:2017 Conservation and care of archive and library collections
- EN 16893:2018 Conservation of Cultural Heritage - Specifications for location, construction and modification of buildings or rooms intended for the storage or use of heritage collections
- PAS 197:2009 Code of practice for cultural collections management
- PAS 198: 2012 Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections
- Benchmarks in Collections Care for Museums, Archives and Libraries, A Self-assessment Checklist, The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, 2002
- BS 4971:2002 Repair and allied processes for the conservation of documents-Recommendations
- European Confederation of Conservators-Restorers Organisations (ECCO) Professional Guidelines and Code of Ethics.

9. REVIEW

9.1 This policy will be reviewed every 3 years or earlier depending on whether circumstances change.

VERSION CONTROL

Version	Date	Detail
1.0	04/05/2020	Succeeds previous Bath Record Office Collections Care Policy drafted in 2017
1.1	09/11/2020	Reworked for Cabinet member approval. Decision made 20/11/2020