

Standards of Service

Cumbria Archives discharges the statutory responsibilities of Cumberland Council and Westmorland & Furness Council under the Public Records Act (1958) and the Local Government Act 1972 (section 224) which requires the councils to make “proper arrangements” for records in its custody. These standards are monitored by The National Archives, an agency of the Ministry of Justice.

“Records” include:

- Records created by the authority and its predecessors in the course of its business (both semi-current and those appraised to be classified as archival)
- Records held on behalf of central government and subject to the Public Records Act 1958
- Records given to or purchased by the authority or deposited with the authority on long term loan

“Proper arrangements” involve standards for the whole range of archive service delivery, including:

- Preservation, storage and protection of the archive collections, including active conservation
- Provision for access for the public, including the provision of catalogues and other finding aids
- Services to schools and other educational bodies and outreach activities to the wider public
- Appropriate staffing in terms of number, qualifications, and experience

Cumbria Archives is an accredited archive service (2013, renewed 2016, 2019), demonstrating national recognition that it meets statutory compliance and high standards of best practice in all areas. This accreditation needs to be renewed every three years to account for any significant changes to governance, management, staffing, premises, opening hours or access arrangements.



Westmorland
& Furness
Council

Working for Cumberland Council and
Westmorland & Furness Council

Cumbria Archives' approach to meeting statutory standards for records is described more fully below.

Preservation and storage

In caring for Cumbria's documentary heritage we follow national standards, BS 4971:2017, Conservation and care of archive and library collections and BS EN 16893:2018 Specifications for buildings or rooms intended for the storage or use of heritage collections, for the protection of records against fire, water, theft, pests, atmospheric pollution, and fluctuating levels of temperature and humidity, within the limits set out in the standards.

Access

To achieve acceptable standards of public access we will:

- Acquire archive collections in accordance with our collecting policy.
- Catalogue and index to international standards of archival description to provide an online catalogue, always available. As at 1 April 2022, some 67% of our collections were covered by online multi-level catalogues, 21% by other detailed finding aids in hard copy and 12% by either a summary list or were uncatalogued. During the 2022 calendar year we received 328 accessions amounting to over 11 cubic metres or over 360 linear feet of documents. We added 34,000 new descriptions to our online catalogue, and we appraised and catalogued some 14.5 cubic metres of records.
- Provide local access to local documentary heritage for visiting researchers in four public research rooms in Barrow, Carlisle, Kendal and Whitehaven.
- Provide high quality, specialist staff advice for visiting researchers. Our searchroom staff are well trained to support family history research and enquiries about a wide range of records. Support for dealing with more complex enquiries will be available from an archivist, whether onsite or offsite and immediately or as soon as possible subsequently. In the 2018 Survey of Visitors to UK Archives, we achieved a rating of 9.3/10 for the quality of our service overall (national local authority average 9.3/10).
- Provide, wherever possible, sufficient staff during advertised opening hours to open all public areas, provide quality advice, produce documents from secure strongrooms on site and maintain the security of the archives in use.

- Produce archives for use by researchers. We aim to produce original documents from the strongrooms at Barrow, Carlisle and Whitehaven in a reasonable time depending on demand and staffing. Documents held in our Archive Centres need to be ordered at least 48 hours in advance. Documents held in our outstore near Carlisle are made available in Carlisle at one week's notice. In 2018, 83% of researchers were very satisfied with our document ordering and delivery routines (national local authority average 76.5%).
- Provide guidance to support researchers via phone, e-mail and letter
- Provide digital images of archives for purchase
- Provide engaging learning sessions for young people, group activities for adults and volunteering opportunities for people of all ages

Staff

We meet the appropriate staffing standards by ensuring:

- There is a qualified and experienced archivist as the senior professional archivist for the service
- All archivists have an appropriate post-graduate qualification in archive administration recognised by Archives and Records Association (ARA), and are encouraged to become registered members of ARA
- All Conservators have an appropriate post-graduate qualification recognised by ARA and/or The Institute of Conservation (ICON) and are encouraged to become registered members of a relevant professional body.
- All para-professional staff are trained in-house to enable them to provide high quality advice to researchers, support the preservation of archives and undertake routine cataloguing.

Peter Eyre
Archives Professional Lead
April 2023