



Issued June 2009

Revised January 2016, confirmed January 2023

1 Scope

This policy covers access for customers to services directly provided by the Royal Berkshire Archives both in person and remotely. It seeks to explain how these services will be made available to customers, and how we will seek to meet customers' needs.

Customers are defined as all residents of the six district councils in Berkshire, residents of that part of Berkshire transferred to Oxfordshire County Council in 1974, and visitors and enquirers from across the UK and overseas.

2 Governing standards

The Royal Berkshire Archives will meet its obligations regarding service provision under the following general statutes:

- Data Protection Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Equality Act 2010

In addition the Royal Berkshire Archives will seek to implement best practice guidance for access which will include The National Archives' *Archive Service Accreditation Standard* as well as guidance from the Archives and Records Association or other recognised national bodies.

3 Our customer service principles

3.1 The Royal Berkshire Archives aims to provide access to its services to all customers, without discrimination. It seeks to provide a range of services that respond to needs both for research and to inform or interest customers.

It seeks to welcome all customers, treat them with courtesy and respect, and to provide them with assistance and advice which is appropriate to their needs.

3.2 Contact information for the Archives will be made available, as well as information about the services it provides. The Archives will also be identified as the provider at the point of access to its services.

3.3 The Archives will respond to all enquiries made of it. Enquiries are defined as questions in which information is requested or advice sought.

3.4 The Archives will seek and respond to customers' views. The Archives will record and respond to complaints about its services. Complaints will be managed through Reading Borough Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure, and staff will be encouraged and given the discretion to resolve complaints at the time they are made.

3.5 Customer services will be measured for speed of response and customer satisfaction. Performance statistics will be made available through CIPFA (the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy).

3.6 All the Archives staff should either be identified or introduced to the members of the public they are serving. Staff providing services will be trained to ensure they have the appropriate skills and knowledge. Procedures and standards for delivering services will be created and all relevant staff will be involved in creating them. Staff will be involved with the development of services.

3.7 Access to the Archives services will not be provided if it places unique archival material at risk of theft, damage or loss, or if statutorily exempt information is at risk of disclosure.

3.8 Access to the Archives services will not be provided to any customer who is violent or abusive, or acts in a threatening or intimidating manner, either towards staff or other customers of the Archives.

4 Access for research

4.1 The Royal Berkshire Archives recognises that there is a statutory right of access for research in some of its holdings.

4.2 The Archives will make available information and descriptions about its research services and about its holdings to customers. Enough information should be provided to enable enquirers to conclude whether the Archives provides relevant services and holds relevant material. Collections information will also note any restrictions on access to information or material contained within the Archives' holdings by statute, depositors' wishes or through preservation needs.

4.3 The Archives will make its research services easy to use. Onsite facilities should be accessible to all, well-presented and adequately signed. Formalities for access will be appropriate to the level of security risk for the material to be consulted, and will be kept as simple as possible. The atmosphere should be welcoming and present no health and safety hazards. All onsite visitors should be attended to as soon as possible, and within a maximum of 5 minutes of their arrival.

4.4 Onsite services will provide a designated and staffed study area, with the ability to retrieve material on demand. Opening hours should be published and displayed onsite. Rules for use of the study area will be available onsite, and users will be requested to agree to them.

4.5 Remote facilities should be identifiable by enquirers without recourse to onsite services. Published telephone numbers should be answered within 60 seconds. All enquiries, whether by telephone, email or letter, should be answered within 10 working days. If a full reply cannot be given within that time, and acknowledgement should be made indicating a date by which time an answer should be expected.

4.6 Support will be provided for new users of research services. Systems, signage and literature will be designed so they can be understood with minimal experience of the Archives.

5 Access for wider public engagement

5.1 The Royal Berkshire Archives will make guidance available about services it provides other than access for research. These services will be provided to benefit those customers who do not have enquiries which require access for research.

5.2 The Archives recognises the potential impact of activities designed to widen public engagement with archives, and also the potential impact of making archival content available online. It will seek to provide resources to develop these activities.