
Executive Member for Leisure, Culture and
Social Inclusion

8 March 2011

Report of the Assistant Director (Communities and Culture)

Collecting Policy for Archives and Local History

Summary

1. This paper seeks approval for a new collecting policy for the Archives and Local History department (see Annex A). The policy sets out the criteria for the acquisition and selection of new archives and local history materials, and the framework under which existing collections will be periodically reviewed. It represents a further step towards the realisation of the vision for the Archives and Local History service agreed by the Executive in December 2008.

Background

2. York City Archives and the Local Studies library were formally merged into a single department within the Library service on 1st April 2010. The purpose of the newly formed Archives and Local History department is to preserve, augment and give public access to archives and published local history materials held in the custody of the City of York Council.
3. The former archives and the local studies library operated separate, largely informal and overlapping collecting policies. The criteria used for the acquisition, selection and review of archives and local history materials lacked both clarity and transparency. This was perpetuated by a culture of poor documentation and collections management.
4. A primary recommendation of the feasibility study report on the future of the Archives (submitted to the Executive in December 2008) was that the service should implement better controls to manage its acquisition of collections. It identified the need to re-focus on collecting, preserving and maintaining a permanent publicly accessible record of the heritage and culture of the City of York in order to promote civic pride, local identity and active citizenship.

Proposal

5. The policy first sets out the department's general statement of collecting (Section 3) and clarifies the scope of collecting (Section 4). It proposes that the primary responsibility of the department is to select, preserve and provide access to the archives of City of York Council, local public records and archives and published materials relating to the history, culture and identity of the communities and citizens of the City of York.

6. It further proposes that the highest collecting priority be given to archives and published materials which relate primarily or most significantly to communities, organisations and individuals within the administrative boundaries of the City of York Council or former parts of the historic County Borough of York. Contextualising published materials relating to Yorkshire, other parts of the United Kingdom and the world will be selectively collected to enhance the use and accessibility of these York-focused collections.
7. Acceptance of archives and published material into our custody means that we are accepting a continuing obligation on behalf of City of York Council to preserve this material and to give public access to it. This represents a significant long-term resource commitment on behalf of City of York Council.
8. The policy therefore proposes a set of criteria against which future and current collections can be appraised before acquisition or during a review to inform consistent decision-making. The policy articulates the way in which existing collections material, which no longer conforms to the criteria, will be ethically and responsibly handled, with every effort being made to transfer it to another more suitable institution where public access can be maintained.

Implications

Legal

9. The framework for the selection, acquisition and appraisal of archives and published materials, as set out in Sections 5 and 6 of the policy, will ensure that the terms under which materials are held are legally sound, fully recorded and auditable.
10. The review process, as set out in Section 9, will enable the compilation of robust audit trails for archives and unique published materials already held by the department. As a result of poor documentation and collections management in the past, it is currently uncertain on what basis some material is held. It is important to either establish City of York Council's ownership of this material, or negotiate alternative terms of its custody.

Equalities

11. The policy states that we will collect archives and published materials to represent, as far as possible, the full range of activities, cultures and viewpoints within the City of York. It proposes that we regularly review the collections in conjunction with our stakeholders to identify any gaps in coverage and take all practicable steps to address any weak areas.

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12. The collecting policy clarifies for the first time that the department will collect material in any format or media (excepting the caveats set out in Section 4.4.1), including computer-generated documents, databases and other electronic records, and online content.

Recommendations

13. The Executive Member is asked to agree to the new collecting policy.

Reason: To put in place an auditable and sustainable collecting policy which will move forward the Executive's Vision for the Archives Service

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Report
Approved



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Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report