

Customer Services Policy

West Sussex Record Office

1. Introduction

West Sussex Record Office's aims are: to acquire and preserve the recorded heritage of West Sussex for reference and enjoyment by present and future generations; to make these available to all who wish to see them, and provide an expert advice service where appropriate; to run a Records Management Service providing centralised, secure and confidential storage, access and retrieval system for the modern records of West Sussex County Council, and to work in partnership with our users, with owners and depositors, and with providers of allied services to stimulate interest in archives and local studies, to widen and improve access, and to help in the long-term preservation of our recorded heritage. We continually strive to improve the service we offer our customers and to respond to their needs and suggestions, subject to the over-riding need to protect the Record Office's unique and irreplaceable holdings.

2. Our service to customers

We have many customers, whose needs we have to balance in determining priorities and work programmes. This policy statement relates primarily to those who use our archive collections either directly or through written, telephone or e-mail enquiries. Other customers are the owners or custodians of records, whether in our care or their own, and West Sussex County Council departments who use our Records Management service. Our policy with regard to these groups can be found in our Collecting Policy and Records Management Policy statements. Our Outreach Policy statement covers how we aim to increase awareness of our service, encourage increased use of it and how we can help in provision of services like education.

The customers who use the Record Office searchroom and classroom come from varying backgrounds and have different needs. All our customers have equal standing in our eyes and we will seek to meet their needs in the most appropriate way.

3. Service in the Searchroom

Our archive collections are available to all to consult without charge and during our advertised opening times. Because our holdings are unique and irreplaceable, security needs to be maintained. Customers need to have a County Archive Research Network (CARN) reader's ticket, or a temporary ticket issued on the day by our Reception staff. Customers are asked to follow general guidelines for the protection of our holdings, which are explained in our basic information leaflet.

The opening hours of our Searchroom include provision on Saturdays and late night opening on Thursdays.

The staff in our searchroom are appropriately trained, helpful, friendly and wear badges that identify them as staff. They will offer advice and help on the collections

and how to use them. We will endeavour to employ available resources within our budget to provide a balanced range of services but we recognise that there will be occasions when we cannot provide the level and quantity of help which some of our customers would like.

Facilities are provided for the consultation of original documents, microform, digital, electronic and audio-visual records, and there is an extensive library of printed books.

We welcome school groups and individual school pupils, as well as further and higher education groups. Particularly in the case of groups, contact needs to be made with our Education Officer in advance of a visit. Our service to schools in the production of National Curriculum-based resources is covered in our Outreach policy document.

We will provide a clean, safe, comfortable and quiet environment for our customers to work in, with full access for the disabled to all our public areas. Cloakrooms, lockers and a refreshment area are available for customer's use.

The standards of service our customers can expect are set out in the Record Office's Charter of Service. We will continue to monitor our compliance with these standards.

4. Finding Aids

Without finding aids, the archives collections we hold cannot be used. Our policy is to provide readily understandable finding aids for all our collections as soon as possible. Considerable progress continues to be made in listing uncatalogued material from our backlog, very few collections are not box listed, and we will continue to devote time to this and to improve finding aids for inadequately catalogued archives. All card indexes are described in Searchroom Leaflet No.4. We intend to introduce a policy that all new accessions of four boxes or less should be catalogued within a year of receipt.

Some 90% of our catalogues are now accessible on-line via the Access to Archives (A2A) website. There is a link from our own web pages to the A2A site. Staff can give advice on accessing A2A. Details of our catalogues are also being placed on our in-house CALM computer system, which is publicly available. It is not normally practicable to make uncatalogued material available to customers but where a particular item is sought, efforts will be made to meet the needs of the customer.

Copies of our catalogues are also available at the National Archives as part of the National Register of Archives and copies of catalogues of our major collections are available for sale and in local libraries. We aim to catalogue and index our collections in accordance with national and international standards in order to facilitate the networking of information.

In order to make our collections easier to use, we will continue to provide searchroom leaflets and booklets describing certain collections, or how they may be used, aimed at different groups of customers with varying needs.

We will continue to suggest ways of making use of our collections in our published series of Local History Mini-Guides to places and subjects, researched and published in association with West Sussex County Library Service. Our aim is to publish two such Mini-Guides each year, one devoted to a place in West Sussex and the other devoted to a research subject.

Our aim is to extend our our series of searchroom leaflets, which give guidance on how to use certain types of records in our care.

5. Access

Our aim is to provide access as widely as possible to the documents in our care. We aim to retrieve catalogued documents from the strongrooms within fifteen minutes. Some restricted documents and uncatalogued collections sometimes require advance notice.

There will inevitably be occasions when our customers cannot see the items they request. The owners of records may have placed restrictions on access at the time of deposit, and there are some legal restrictions on access to public records. Generally these restrictions apply to personal, or confidential, records. As a matter of course we will try to encourage depositors not to restrict access. We will explain any such restrictions to our customers and apply them equitably.

It may not be possible to make available documents which are in poor physical condition, where making them available would be prejudicial to their survival. Where microform or photographic copies of records have been made, we ask our customers to use these in place of the originals.

If a customer asks to see privately deposited records in connection with legal proceedings we will consult the depositor before this use is allowed. We will not give advice, opinions or rulings to customers on legal matters.

6. Making Copies

We will provide facilities to make copies of documents. Details of our reprographic services are given in Searchroom Leaflet No.3. Copies will be made subject to the provisions of the Copyright Acts in force and any restrictions placed by the owners of the material. The County Council agrees the scale of fees for such copies each year. Copies will not be made where there is a physical risk to the record from the copying process. In these cases we will explain the reason to the customer and try to suggest an alternative approach.

We aim to provide prints from microform on the day the request is received from personal callers, and within five working days for postal, telephone or e-mail enquiries. Any new filming of documents will be dispatched within three months of receipt of a confirmed order.

Customers are required to sign a Copyright Declaration form when ordering copies of documents.

If customers wish to reproduce copies in a publication, they must apply for permission to do this and reproduction fees are payable, though we do not normally charge these for local non-profit-making publications. Where records are privately owned permission must be sought from the owners of the documents concerned.

7. Enquiries and Research

We will provide a well-informed and helpful service to customers who write, e-mail or telephone the Record Office, ensuring that they receive appropriate advice on the sources, which will help them and on their availability.

Enquiries received by Email and letter will be acknowledged within five working days and, if research and information is required, will be answered in full within ten working days.

We provide a Research Service, for a fee, for those unable to visit the Record Office in person, to undertake research on documents in our care. Details can be found in West Sussex Record Office information Leaflet: Research Service and on our website. We also maintain a list of independent record searchers so that customers have a choice.

8. Listening to our Customers

We endeavour to provide a good service, but there are occasions when things can go wrong. We are anxious to hear if we have not provided a service to our customer's satisfaction or have failed to keep our policy promises. All complaints are followed up as soon as possible and there is a formal complaints procedure.

We welcome suggestions and comments from customers for improvements to any aspect of our services. Feedback forms are available in the searchroom and a comments book is provided at the Reception Desk for suggestions and complaints and verbal comments are recorded by staff. We also participate in the national user surveys organised by CIPFA.

We will actively seek customer's opinions on our services and how they are delivered, not only through comments and complaints procedures but also through occasional customer surveys. Monthly meetings of searchroom staff will consider comments and complaints and discuss ways of further improving service delivery.

County Archivist
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