



For immediate release

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First Local Authority archive survey reveals wide variations

The first comprehensive survey of local authority archive services reveals a postcode lottery of service quality across England and Wales. The variations in service mean that some irreplaceable historical records run the risk of not surviving for future generations.

The Local Authority archive survey – a self-assessment programme co-ordinated by The National Archives – revealed some excellent local authority archive services. Norfolk and the London Metropolitan Archives came top in the survey, commended for their work in developing collections, and both achieving a 3-star ranking.

Bucking the trend for smaller archives, Westminster (3-star) and Tameside (2-star) also scored well, and the East Riding of Yorkshire achieved 3 stars as a result of a new building, opened in 2006. Unfortunately, at the other end of the scale, nearly 13% of the 117 services assessed failed to gain any stars at all.

Natalie Ceeney, chief executive at The National Archives, commented: “Local archives are key to preserving our nation’s heritage, and the services they provide are invaluable both generally and in the communities they serve. The Local Authority archive survey is a great step forward, enabling archives to show local authorities where they are doing well, how they compare to other services and the areas in need of improvement. Indeed, the results show that, despite the quality of effort, there is a lot of work to be done to ensure our heritage is adequately cared for.”

The survey reveals common areas where many local archive services continue to face challenges:

- Arrangements for the permanent preservation of digital records
- Improving building facilities to ensure development and quality of service provision
- Addressing cataloguing backlogs, to improve access to collections
- Developing collections, which continues to be a challenge due to lack of staff and storage capacity, and financial constraints making it difficult to buy collections

Nicholas Kingsley, head of the National Advisory Services at The National Archives, said: “Perhaps the clearest message is although local archives achieve a huge amount with the resources they are given, larger institutions are often better able to cope with all the responsibilities of an archive and offer higher quality services. We are working with local archives to help them address the difficulties the survey has brought to light. There may be a case here for some smaller archives to look at consolidating their services, or moving to joint provision.”

The full table of results can be found [here](#).

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For further information, or to arrange an interview, please contact Séverine Gould, senior press officer at The National Archives:

Tel: 020 8392 5277

Email: severine.gould@nationalarchives.gov.uk

Notes to editors

About the Local Authority archive survey

More information can be found at: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives/self-assessment.htm. The Local Authority archive survey took place between June and August 2007, run on a voluntary basis. Out of a possible 125, 117 service took part – almost 90% participation. Each service completed a lengthy questionnaire, with a mix of multiple choice questions and narrative answers, which measure five aspects of each service:

- Governance and resources
- Documentation of collections
- Access services
- Preservation and conservation
- Buildings, security and the environment

Staff at The National Archives scored each questionnaire. This scoring was then reviewed by an independent panel composed of representatives from the sector and other interested bodies. Local authorities were advised of their results in December and have since had the opportunity to appeal against their results if necessary. The results for individual services are shown at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives/self-assessment.htm

There is a percentage score for each of the five aspects of the survey, as well as an overall score. Performance bandings have been assigned for each aspect of service that reflect the ranking of the scores. Overall performance banding is assigned partly on the basis of the ranking of the total scores, but services also have to achieve a threshold score on every area of performance to qualify.

About The National Archives

The National Archives, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk, is a government department; and also an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). The National Archives brings together the Public Record Office, Historical Manuscripts Commission, the Office of Public Sector Information and Her Majesty's Stationery Office. See also www.opsi.gov.uk

The National Archives is at the heart of information policy – setting standards and supporting innovation in information and records management across the UK, and providing a practical framework of best practice for opening up and encouraging the re-use of public sector information. This work helps inform today's decisions and ensure that they become tomorrow's permanent record.

The National Archives is also the UK government's official archive, containing 900 years of history from Domesday Book to the present, with records ranging from parchment and paper scrolls through to recently created digital files and archived websites. Increasingly, these records are being put online, making them universally accessible.

The vision of The National Archives is to:

- Lead and transform information management
- Guarantee the survival of today's information for tomorrow
- Bring history to life for everyone