

Scope of the Policy

The aim of this policy is to set out a co-ordinated approach to access to the collections held by the Highland Archive Service (HAS) at the Highland Archive Centre, Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre, Lochaber Archive Centre and Nucleus: The Nuclear and Caithness Archives. It will set out the access procedures to collections both in-person and remotely and will explain the ways in which HAS seeks to actively publicise, celebrate and promote the collections through engagement.

It should be read in conjunction with the Collections Management Policy, and Engagement Policy and other policy documents.

Mission Statement

Highland Archive Service, as part of High Life Highland, enables The Highland Council to fulfil its legal responsibility to preserve and provide access to its public records. Alongside this core function, we are dedicated to collecting, conserving, and making accessible, records that reflect the history and diversity of the Scottish Highlands and its inhabitants. We strive to make these collections as widely accessible as possible in our Archive Centres, through a variety of digital channels, and via an active community engagement programme.

Our mission is to benefit present and future generations, promoting the use of these records in:

- informing local decision-making
- strengthening community and cultural identity
- engaging with communities in ways that enhance learning, representation, inclusion, and equity
- improving health and wellbeing through the study and enjoyment of history
- **Making Life Better** for everyone, across Highland communities and beyond

Service Objectives

Archives

- To fulfil a custodial role in the preservation, acquisition, and cataloguing of the Highlands' archives both physical and digital
- To publicise the collections, providing opportunities to engage with archives that increase representation, inclusion, and equity for everyone through celebrating the documentary heritage of the Highlands, both in-person and online
- To develop and promote best practice in preservation and conservation by being an instructing office on the Archive and Records Association Conservation Training Scheme
- To develop and support sustainable partnerships which enable communities and individuals to engage with, explore and enjoy archives through training and mentoring opportunities

Records Management

- To ensure that information and records sources are retained only for as long as is necessary for legal compliance and administrative need across High Life Highland (HLH) and The Highland Council (THC)
- To develop and promote best practice and legal compliance in the creation, use, maintenance and disposal of information and records
- To manage records stores across the authority's area containing HLH and THC semi-current records and provide a retrieval service in respect of those records
- To co-ordinate the selection and transfer of records, both physical and digital, from THC into the custody of HAS, contributing to the Council's corporate memory
- To work with THC's Information Governance Board and HLH's Management Team to ensure compliance with legislation relating to information and record keeping
- To provide professional input into the development and review of THC's Records Management Plan (RMP) required under the Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011

Our users

- We serve our communities' stakeholders, whether users or depositors of records, as effectively and efficiently as possible, and make the collections in our care widely accessible through a variety of means, both within and outwith the Highland area
- We monitor the service we provide by means of customer surveys including the Public Services Quality Group (PSQG) Survey of Visitors to UK Archives and other data collection
- We collect and analyse feedback from our customers including visitors to our searchrooms, remote enquirers as well as those who attend classes or events in-person or online. This ensures the continued improvement of our services in line with the expressed wishes of our communities
- We make a conscious effort to publicise and facilitate access to our collections through our [online catalogue](#), our regular series of newspaper articles and by holding classes, exhibitions, lectures and other events both in-person at our Centres and at other venues throughout the Highlands as well as online
- We communicate upcoming events with our audiences via our regular newsletter and social media channels
- We strive to make our activities inclusive for all members of our communities regardless of age, disability, gender, religion or background
- Please see the Engagement Policy for further information regarding our specific engagement aims and objectives

Making our collections accessible: In-person users

Visitor Information

- All four Archive Centres have regular opening hours which can be found on our [website](#), alongside additional visitor information including details on car parking and access. All four Centres are wheelchair accessible
- There is no need to make an advance appointment to visit any Centre and the collections of each Centre are held entirely on site and can be retrieved within 15 minutes (restrictions permitting – see below)
- There is no charge to access documents in our public searchrooms, but users are advised that HLH is a charity, and donations received to support the work of HAS are appreciated
- On arrival visitors to the searchroom complete a registration form and will be asked to place bags and jackets in lockers before entering the searchroom (if applicable)
- All four of our searchrooms (and the Family History Centre in the Highland Archive Centre) are supervised by trained members of staff who are easily identifiable by name-badges and lanyards

Accessing the collections

- Catalogues in our searchrooms list the collections held on site and staff will assist in advising visitors of archives which may be relevant to their area of research. Prior to their visit, visitors can search our online catalogue to identify records of interest
- 'How To' Guides, giving basic information about records series and resources are available in our public searchrooms and staff are also on hand to assist with further explaining, contextualising or interpreting documents
- Any documents subject to access restrictions for reasons of data protection, depositor restriction, fragility or any other reason will not be produced, but the reasons for this will be explained to the user
- We are able to provide assistance to visitors who have a visual impairment by means of magnifying glasses/sheets

Searchroom Rules

- While giving access to our collections, the long-term security and preservation of our documents is of the highest priority
- Searchroom Rules, publicly viewable in all our searchrooms, remind visitors of the irreplaceable nature of archives, advise on the appropriate method for handling documents, and explain the reasons why behaviours, such as bringing food and drink into the searchroom or using pens are not permitted
- The Highland Archivist, or their representative, has the authority to exclude anyone who does not comply with the Searchroom Rules

Surrogates and provision of copies

- The archive collections in our care exist in a variety of formats, original archive material, microforms, digital, and other surrogates, and are for the most part available for consultation by visitors
- Microfilm and microfiche readers are available in all Archive Centres and public access computers are available at three of our four Centres
- Copying of archive material is allowed for personal research providing the item is sufficiently stable to permit it without being damaged and providing it is not subject to any copyright restriction. (We will explain the reasons for any restrictions on copying)
- Those requesting copies will be asked to complete a reprographics form
- Photography (self-service without the use of a flash) is permitted, again subject to the above considerations and on completion of a self-service photography form
- Details of our charges are displayed in all four Archive Centres, are available on our website and will be clearly explained to our customers prior to payment
- Copying for publication in any format will be considered subject to the above

Making our collections accessible: remote users

The Highland Archive Service recognises that many people with an interest in the collections held, and services provided, by us may be unable to visit in person for a variety of reasons. We therefore offer an enquiry service to members of the public who seek advice by telephone, letter, email or via our social media platforms.

Remote Enquiries

- Staff will provide basic information from our catalogues free of charge or provide links to relevant online catalogue entries. We also offer a paid service for members of the public who wish us to undertake commissioned research on their behalf
- Searches will be made of all the records available to us, either in the original format, microfilm/fiche, printed or web-based and the results provided to the enquirer (subject to relevant legislation)
- The format of the response will be dependent upon the nature of the enquiry, and may take the form of photocopies, digital copies, family trees or family history reports
- Details of our charges are displayed in all four Archive Centres, are available on our website and will be clearly explained to enquirers before the research is undertaken
- We monitor our remote enquiry service through feedback forms as well as the CALM Enquiries database

Online Engagement

- We offer online classes in Archives for Beginners, Family History for Beginners and Advanced Family History designed to enhance attendees' knowledge of, and confidence in using, our collections
- Our [Learn with Lorna](#) series of short films about the documents in our collections is broadcast across all four Archive Centres' Facebook pages and is also available on YouTube, enabling access to our collections for those across the world with an interest in Highland history
- We deliver a diverse programme of online talks, using our collections as a way to delve into the stories of people, places, and events across the centuries
- We create online exhibitions and blogs, available on our website, which allow our communities to enjoy an in-depth examination of a subject or a collection

Website and Social Media

- HAS maintains and manages the Highland History and Culture website [Am Baile](#) which provides remote access to a wide range of historical material relating to the Highlands and Islands
- We are committed to maintaining high quality social media pages (currently Facebook, X and Instagram) and releasing regular newsletters sharing information about the work and collections of the Highland Archive Service. In this way we are able to provide access to, and familiarity with, our collections to a wide-ranging audience
- We use these mediums to encourage attendance at our regular in-person and online classes and public events where archive material will be displayed and interpreted
- Our website, gives full contact details for each of our four Centres and provides information on collections, an online catalogue, conservation and records management functions, engagement and outreach activities, online exhibitions and blogs, Am Baile, conference and business facilities and an online shop
- Further details of our public events, the ways in which we seek to provide access to schools, colleges and universities for educational purposes, and the aim of the Highland Archive Service to increase diversity of users can be found in the Highland Archive Service Engagement Policy

Policy Review Schedule

This policy is issued in March 2025 and will be reviewed and updated as necessary every three years or earlier if a response is needed to any changes in legislation.