

1. Introduction

Bedfordshire Archives & Records Service provides a county record office for the historic county of Bedfordshire and a records management service for Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and Luton Borough Council.

The mission of the archive service is to collect, preserve and make available the documentary heritage of the historic county of Bedfordshire and its people.

The mission of the records service is to effectively manage the semi-current records for the three unitary authorities of Bedfordshire until such time as the records may either be destroyed or selected for permanent preservation as archives.

The bulk of the records within the archive service are in hard copy formats such as paper and parchment and at present the records service only handles the hard copy records of the authorities. However, the archive service have started to receive deposits of records in digital format and the records service is involved in developing and implementing the retention schedules for records in both hard copy and digital formats.

Records are now often created in a digital format. These formats rely on software and hardware to enable them to be read. The digital world is developing quickly and software and hardware rapidly become obsolete potentially leaving records that cannot be read. Digital formats can become corrupt or degrade without warning leaving the record incomplete or usable. In order to ensure that digital records remain accessible a proactive approach has to be taken to their preservation.

This policy outlines the approach of the Bedfordshire Archives & Records Service to digital preservation. The policy is reliant upon and will become a part of Bedford Borough Council's digital preservation policy.

2. Scope

This policy covers:

- born digital files deposited under acquisitions procedure and held as original archives by the archives service
- born digital files transferred under the records management procedures of the three unitary authorities of Bedfordshire and held as originals for permanent preservation as part of their archives.
- digital surrogate/access copy files created from original documents in any media required for permanent retention as part of the resources of the archives service.

3. Responsibilities

The Service Manager (Archives Records) is the owner and champion of this policy. The Service Manager works closely with the ICT and Business Transformation departments of Bedford Borough Council and will report to and seek approval from the Information Governance Board of Bedford Borough Council, which in turn reports to Senior Management Team. The Service Manager will also liaise with the equivalent bodies within Central Bedfordshire and Luton Borough Councils.

Archivists and records access officers working for the service will be responsible for providing advice to depositors and internal departments, for following the procedure for ingest of the material and for enabling access to the material by suitable means.

4. Strategy

The OAIS (Open Archival Information System) model is the model aspired to.

4.1 Ingest and file formats

In order to make best use of the limited resources available to the archive service incoming files must be in 'open format' or very widely used formats supported by the ICT systems of Bedford Borough Council. More guidance for depositors is available from the service.

Ideally the original formatting within the document should be preserved. However, it is accepted that this may not always be possible when an alternative version has to be supplied in order to ensure that the service is able to work with the file.

As well as the digital records producers, whether depositors or internal departments, must provide metadata to enable the capture of information to enable the record to be understood and processed.

To enable the archives service to provide access to the material copyrights and intellectual property rights and other interests in the material must be understood and suitable permissions must be in place.

4.2 Storage

Master copies of digital records will be transferred to servers run or procured by Bedford Borough Council. These servers will conform to best practice for the storage of local authority records.

4.3 Preservation and migration

Before files are accepted and transferred to the servers they will be checked by ICT for damage, viruses and suitability of file format.

Files will be migrated in line with changes and developments within the Bedford Borough ICT systems. A strategy for checking and migration will be discussed with ICT and agreed through the Information Governance Board and Senior Management Team.

4.4 Access and use

Access copies of digital records will be made to enable appropriate access. The method of access will vary depending on the type of file and the terms of the deposit, the nature of the record and the requirement for access either onsite or remotely.

5. Standards, guidance and organisations

Standards and guidance which inform digital preservation strategies and processes at Bedfordshire Archives & Records Service include the following:

- The Dublin Core Metadata Element Set (ISO Standard 15836:2009)
- The OAIS (Open Archival Information System)
- Code of Practice for legal admissibility and evidential weight of information stored electronically (BIP 0008).

The following organisations are relevant to digital preservation and will be consulted in the process of developing digital preservation strategies:

- The Digital Preservation Coalition
- The Digital Curation Centre
- The National Archives

6. Review

This policy will be reviewed at least every three years. The next scheduled review is November 2018.