

## **Review of the Durham Light Infantry (DLI) Collection and Archive**

Durham County Council

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Council Chamber, County Hall, 28 July 2021

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### **The National Archives written statement**

The National Archives has been invited to present views on the Review of the Durham Light Infantry (DLI) Collection and Archive.

We are grateful for this opportunity to provide a written statement which focuses on the nature of our responsibilities in respect of archive collections in England and describes our relationship with Durham County Record Office and the Durham History Centre project.

#### Our Role

The National Archives is a non-ministerial government department linked to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. The National Archives has a leadership role for archives in England, informing policy development and supporting archives to deliver effective services which meet the needs and expectations of their stakeholders.

The Chief Executive and Keeper of Public Records also has a statutory role in relation to local archive services where they have been appointed to hold records under the Public Records Act 1958.

The National Archives has a long-standing relationship with Durham County Record Office which is underpinned by the Place of Deposit arrangements. Durham County Record Office is approved by The National Archives, on behalf of the Secretary of State, to hold certain categories of public record under section 4(1) of the Public Records Act, including those for local Magistrates' Courts, Coroners, hospitals, and prisons.

Our leadership role and other responsibilities mean that The National Archives takes an interest in the Record Office for a variety of other reasons connected with the development of services and collections, and the Archives Sector Development team work closely with Record Office staff.

#### Background

Durham County Record Office's collections are of major significance, and they form an integral and important part of the overall national network of archive services. The performance of the Record Office has also been recognised by the award in

2018 of Archive Service Accreditation, the UK standard for archive services. We know the Durham Light Infantry Archive has been in the care of Durham County Record Office since 1998 and is an important part of the county's archival collections. The Archive has been developed substantially since it was transferred, receiving recently an Archives Revealed cataloguing grant to increase accessibility and bring new stories to life<sup>1</sup>.

We have been working closely with Durham County Record Office on the development of new archive facilities for some time and we support the approach taken to adapt the Mount Oswald site for archive purposes and to combine the Record Office with several other services within the History Centre.

It has been apparent for a number of years that the current archive accommodation at County Hall is becoming increasingly unsuitable for such important records and there was insufficient capacity to further develop the collection with little scope for creating expansion space on the site that would meet current archival good practice standards.

The temporary measures taken to address these accommodation issues are impressive in the circumstances and have allowed Place of Deposit status to continue; however, they could only be seen as an interim arrangement rather than a long-term solution.

In this context the development of plans for the Durham History Centre was therefore positive and encouraging and represents an important step towards ensuring that all County Durham's wide-ranging and unique archival heritage will be housed in state-of-the-art facilities and will be made available to local communities in a variety of innovative ways, for the current and future generations. It will also secure Place of Deposit status and Archive Service Accreditation.

### Options for arrangements for the DLI Collection and Archive

We would like to highlight two matters to be considered in the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board's consideration of the available options for the arrangements of the DLI Collection and Archive:

1. We recommend that national standards and best practice are followed in respect of archive accommodation and the accompanying services. In addition to the national standards on preservation and archive facilities, there is specific guidance on the management of archives in museum settings that would be relevant<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Archives Revealed is a partnership programme between The National Archives, The Pilgrim Trust and the Wolfson Foundation, and is the only funding stream in the UK dedicated to cataloguing and unlocking archives.

<sup>2</sup> The relevant standards and guidance include: BS4971:2017, *Conservation and care of archive and library collections*, BS EN16893:2018, *Conservation of Cultural Heritage. Specifications for location, construction and modification of buildings or rooms intended for the storage or use of heritage collections*, The Association for Independent Museums, *Successfully Managing Archives in Museums* (2015) and The National Archives, *Managing mixed collections. Guidance for archive services* (2021).

There are potentially economies of scale and other efficiencies to be derived from managing collections together in a holistic way where they benefit from ideal conditions and professional care, and advantages in terms of access in having complementary records available at a single location.

It is also our view that collaboration and partnership working can underpin the sustainability of the future operating models for the organisations involved and has advantages for the users of their services.

2. The development of the Durham History Centre scheme is a considerable achievement, and the Centre is likely to be a noteworthy addition to the region's heritage facilities. We would therefore hope that the review takes into consideration the potential implications for the Durham History Centre and its success and continued sustainability. Substantial changes to the scheme could affect the retention of Archive Service Accreditation.

We hope that these comments are of assistance, and we would be very happy to respond to any questions the Board may have arising from this statement.

Dr Emma Markiewicz  
Head of Archives Sector Development  
The National Archives