Minutes of the Standing Conference on Archives held at the Royal Berkshire Archives on Friday 22 November 2025 at 2pm

Present: David Cliffe (Berkshire Local History Association), Cllr Stephen Conway (Wokingham Borough Council, Chairman), Cllr Nigel Foot (West Berkshire Council), Felicity Harrison (West Berkshire Council), Jacquie Kavanagh (Diocese of Oxford), Andrew Moulton (Wokingham Borough Council), Donna Pentelow (Reading Borough Council), Catherine Sampson (Berkshire Family History Society), Mark Stevens (Royal Berkshire Archives), Cllr Liz Terry (Reading Borough Council), Ellie Thorne (Royal Berkshire Archives, minutes)

Apologies: Elise Battison (Bracknell Forest Council), Joan Dils (Berkshire Record Society), Angela Huisman (Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead), Liz McMillan (Slough Borough Council), Cllr Neel Rana (Slough Borough Council), Dr Jacqui Turner (University of Reading)

1 Minutes of the meeting held 20 June 2025

The minutes were agreed and signed.

Matters arising:

1: The National Archives' revised vision for archives was expected in the new year.
3: The Royal Merchant Navy Education Foundation would celebrate their bicentenary in 2027. They had agreed to fund conservation work to items they hoped to use in celebratory events.
5: The agreed, revised terms of reference had been circulated to Standing Conference. Archives Board felt that membership identification was best answered through the Berkshire County Council minute that had established Standing Conference. That minute, from the community services committee in 1992, had been circulated.

2 Half-year report

Mark Stevens highlighted the following aspects of the report:

- Acquisition of more material for Miles Aircraft Ltd and Percy Trentham Ltd
- A slight decrease in the cataloguing backlog
- The Thames exhibition, which attracted over 300 visitors onsite, and associated activity

- An update on staffing matters

Standing Conference recorded their congratulations to the Archives' new mothers and asked that their best wishes be passed onto Ivone.

3 Capital works update

The groundworks contract for the extension had been completed. This met the 'meaningful start' requirement for planning. Three tenders had been received for the main contract and West Berkshire had appointed Feltham Construction Ltd.

Mark Stevens had attended a meeting with Feltham on 7 November. Discussion included discharge of planning conditions. Standing Conference was asked to note that West Berkshire wished to substitute the current condition for a green/brown roof for additional planting onsite. Providing a green/brown roof did not meet the British Standard for storage of heritage collections, meaning that The National Archives would not licence the extension for storage. Cllr Liz Terry asked Mark Stevens and Donna Pentelow to liaise with Reading's planning officers.

Standing Conference was asked to note that the total project commitment was slightly above the existing budget. However, Archives Board was confident that the gap would be bridged by value engineering and service income streams.

The Chairman asked when the Archives was expected to occupy the extension. Mark Stevens explained that, following construction, there would be a period of drying out before the extension was safe for storage. This meant that occupation would begin at the end of 2027 at the earliest. In the meantime, the service was confident that it could continue to accept organic collections.

4 Survey of visitors to UK archives

This survey had been run by the Archives and Records Association during October-November 2024.

Overall satisfaction with the visitor service was rated at 9.3/10, with even higher scores for staff interactions with visitors. Areas with slightly lower scores were generally connected to IT and, after the survey, work to improve the wifi speed and appearance of the online catalogue had been delivered.

Standing Conference registered their delight with the results and asked that congratulations be passed to staff.

5 Joint agreement

Standing Conference was asked to note that the current iteration of the joint agreement for archives would expire on 31 March 2028.

Mark Stevens outlined the renewal process that had been followed before the previous expiry in 2013. It was proposed to take a similar approach now. The likely timetable was that West Berkshire, as archives authority, would make a recommendation in summer 2027 to Berkshire Leaders and Chief Executives. Each council would then take a decision through its internal process before March 2028.

Archives Board requested that the Berkshire Prosperity Board be consulted before options were investigated. The Chairman stated his view that archives fell outside the remit of a devolved, strategic authority. Cllr Liz Terry noted that joint arrangements may be discussed as part of Oxfordshire's local government reorganisation.

Mark Stevens would keep Standing Conference updated with progress. Information-gathering would begin in the new year.

6 Any other business

Liz McMillan, Slough's officer representative, would be leaving the council in early January. Mark Stevens wished to record his thanks for Liz's support over many years, and particularly for helping navigate the consequences of Slough's section 114 notice.

7 Date of next meeting

The next meeting of Standing Conference would be at 2pm, Friday 19 June 2025, at the Royal Berkshire Archives.