**Digital Strategy 2025-2028**

**1. Introduction**

1.1 Gwent Archives is an Accredited local authority archive service established in 1938 as Monmouthshire Record Office at Shire Hall, Newport. Following local government reorganisation in 1974, the Archives were moved to the then newly built County Hall in Cwmbran and rebranded Gwent County Record Office. The service remained there until 2011 when it relocated to the newly renovated General Offices in Ebbw Vale and renamed Gwent Archives. It is a joint service, funded by and serving five local authorities under the 1994 Local Government (Wales) Act:

* Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
* Caerphilly County Borough Council
* Monmouthshire County Council
* Newport City Council
* Torfaen County Borough Council

1.2 Gwent Archives Joint Committee governs the service, made up of 2 councillors from each of the Authorities in addition to Co-opted members. Torfaen County Borough Council are the Host Authority for the service, and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council the landlord.

1.3 Gwent Archives is currently assessing its service priorities. Visitor numbers in-person are much lower than before the Covid-19 pandemic and unlikely to increase. However, engagement with digital activities (social media, digitised images on third-party websites, digitisation service and enquiries service) continues to increase. Requests for information or digitised items have tripled over the last few years.

1.4 The service also recognises that increasingly records and archives are being created in digital format. This material is being offered to the service with the expectation that the service will maintain them over time with the same professional care afforded to the physical collections. Digitisation of the physical collections also means there are digital assets that require preservation.

1.5 Without this change and the delivery of this Digital Strategy, there is a risk the service will no longer be relevant to its audiences (both current & potential) and stakeholders. In the long term, this could threaten the existence of the service, the collections it cares for and its Archive Service Accreditation status.

1.6 The purpose of this digital strategy is to outline how the service will make better use of digital technology to achieve its strategic objectives and deliver this change.

**2. Where are we now?**

* 1. In 2024-2025, we benchmarked the service against the [Digital Preservation Coalition’s Rapid Assessment Model](https://www.dpconline.org/digipres/implement-digipres/dpc-ram) and the [Digital Culture Compass Wayfinder & Tracker](https://digitalculturecompass.org.uk/). A SWOT was created following the assessment:

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| **Strengths**   * The Strategic Plan 2023-2026 for the service has a strong emphasis on digital. * Strong support from the Joint Committee around digital transformation. * Good IT support from SRS (Shared Resource Services). * Strong enthusiasm, ambition and support from some staff. * New digital systems: collections management system/catalogue (Epexio) and preservation system (Preservica) * Some online access to name-heavy collections via family history websites (also raises income). * There is a digital asset register. | **Weaknesses**   * No written digital strategy. * No easy online access to catalogues or digital collections for users/audiences. * The service has been relatively late to adopt digital technologies. * As a result there are low digital skills and confidence amongst some staff. * Digital programming – events and outreach. * Could be stronger on accessibility and inclusion – particularly in terms of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and the service website. |
| **Opportunities**   * Digital use of collections is increasing and users' expectations are changing. * Digital transformation/flooding is a key priority for the Torfaen County Borough Council. * Using new systems (Epexio and Preservica) for preservation and access & new equipment for delivering hybrid events. * New service website platform is being explored & developed. * Realignment of staff roles & responsibilities. * Potential for use of AI | **Threats**   * Potential buy-in and skillset from service staff, including the shift from in-person access to digital. * Balancing resource and audience expectations around in-person versus digital access. * Current website platform (but this is being mitigated with a new website). |

**3. Strategic principles**

3.1 The objectives of this digital strategy are for the service to make the best use of digital technology to:

1. Preserve and secure digital collections: including born-digital archives, digitised/imaged collections and collections information.
2. Provide access and engagement opportunities to collections information and the collections to audiences: including online catalogues, online collections, and innovative digital engagement.
3. Be an effective and efficient service: including trained & supported staff and using digital systems to make the best use of resources.

3.2 This aligns with the service's strategic objectives:

1. Ensuring our collections remain relevant and representative of our communities, and are preserved for the benefit of future generations
2. Engaging all our communities locally, nationally and globally with their past
3. Providing access to our services and collections through a variety of means, and a strong, customer-focussed service to all our customers
4. Encouraging use of the collections to help develop knowledge and skills for the future
5. Maintaining, and growing, a sustainable, future-focussed service

**4. What are we going to do?**

Short term: within one year; medium term: within two years; long term: within three years

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| **Principle** | **Activities** | **Timescales** |
| i. Access & Engagement  ` | Update Accessibility Policy, including digital elements e.g. incorporation of WCAG and delivery of hybrid events, and use of social media. | Short term |
| Continue to license name-heavy collection to family history commercial websites | Medium-term to long-term |
| Input catalogues/indexes onto the collections management system (Epexio) and enhance the quality of the catalogues - in accordance with the collections information plan | Short-term to long-term |
| Improve the quality of parish records via funded cataloguing project | Short-term to medium-term |
| Improve the quality of catalogues/indexes using digital volunteering (Crowd Cymru project) | Medium-term |
| Create a business case/specification for a new service website and secure funding | Short-term |
| Design and user test service website, including content creation and launch | Medium-term |
| Design and user test front end for the online catalogue (Epexio) | Medium-term |
| Launch frontend for the online catalogue (Epexio) | Long-term |
| Look at feasibility of using the exhibitions module in the online catalogue (Epexio) for digital storytelling | Medium term |
| Look at feasibility of making images of documents available online using either online catalogue (Epexio) of integration with Preservica and develop digitisation plan. | Long-term |
| Pilot use of equipment for online/hybrid events and deliver events & activities. | Short-term |
| Train other staff and new staff in use of hybrid event equipment. | Medium-term |
| Deliver digital drop-in sessions for teachers. | Short-term |
| Develop digital resources, videos and online guidance for teachers – linked to the curriculum | Medium-term |
| Continue to deliver social media programme linked to national/international campaigns. | Short-term |
| Develop more visual content for social media e.g. how to videos | Short term to medium-term |
| Undertake consultation and research to understand needs and motivations of young people in engaging with the service & collections, including the use of digital technology. | Medium-term |
| ii Preserve | Update digital preservation policies & procedures so they can be used with Preservica | Short-term |
| Ingest born-digital collections into Preservica | Short-term |
| Set up Preservica integration with the collection management system (Epexio) | Medium term |
| Undertake advocacy work with Councils around digital preservation and collecting | Medium term to Long term |
| iii Effective and efficient | Realignment of resources – aligning the staff structure with the service priorities & objectives, including digital development & delivery | Short term to medium term |
| Deliver practical training in new systems – collections management system (Epexio) and the digital preservation system (Preservica) | Short term |
| Identify staff & volunteer digital training needs via appraisals and audits | Medium term |
| Develop digital training programme based on needs assessment | Long term |
| Explore feasibility of a customer relationship system or using the collections management system (Epexio) to help with enquiries, managing reprographic orders and visits etc. | Medium term |
| Start using digital evaluation forms for events and activities. | Short-term |
| Explore feasibility of using digital technology to make processes more efficient and effective e.g. event bookings, deposit/donation forms, payments, marketing lists. | Medium term |

**5. Resources**

The following staffing resources will be required to deliver this strategy:

* Current archive service staff – a planned realignment of the service offer and the staffing structure will enable staff to have more capacity to deliver this strategy.
* Systems - the collections management system (Epexio) and the digital preservation system (Preservica) have already been procured and are covered by the archive service’s core budget.
* Equipment – the service already holds some hardware & equipment for delivering digital events and digital preservation activity.
* Training – there is a small service training budget for the service and opportunities to apply for the Archives and Records Council Wales workforce development grants.
* Torfaen County Borough Council – some support and assistance may be required from staff in Council departments, including Digital Flooding; Equalities and Diversity; Human Resources; and ICT.
* Additional funding – for some elements additional funding may be required and this will be either sought internally (e.g. new website) or through external funding (parish cataloguing project, Crowd Cymru project).

**6. Risks**

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| **Risk** | **Mitigation** |
| Gaps in staffing resource levels – having enough staff to deliver the strategy | Being prepared for staff changes and backfilling posts as quickly as possible.  Realignment of timescales and priorities. |
| Changes or gaps in resources in the leadership of the archive service. | Full ownership of the strategy by staff and stakeholders.  Advocacy with stakeholders who are decision-makers or funders. |
| Buy-in from staff and stakeholders. | Communication strategy in place around changes and service/digital strategy including clear messaging on purpose, context, and milestones.  Advocacy with stakeholders who are decision-makers or funders. |
| Not enough budget to deliver ambition. | Advocacy with the Joint Committee and other funders. |
| Partners are unable to offer support and resources including the All Wales Digital Preservation Consortium. | Regular communication and identifying issues early.  Realignment of priorities and timescales. |
| Suppliers change or cease or exist. | Contracts with suppliers and procurement.  Continuing relationships with suppliers and communication. |
| Lack of understanding about audiences and their needs/expectations, particularly non-users and new/target audiences. | User surveys and feedback, including digital users  Engagement and consultation with new/target audiences |

This Strategy was approved by the Gwent Archives Joint Committee in June 2025.