

# Harwell Case Study: Critical document recovery after council arson attack.

When an arson attack caused a huge fire at the main offices of South Oxfordshire District Council, the level of damage to the building fabric and its contents was extremely severe. Every single department within the council was affected, including property, finance, legal, HR and audit teams. The timing was also extremely problematic, with the fire occurring just a few weeks before local and general elections and with key executive staff overseas.

Invocation of the council's business continuity plan and contact with the council's insurers ensured that a major loss project team was formed at an early stage to consider the recovery operation. Salvage and restoration of critical documents was a key component of this. Harwell Restoration was appointed to attend the site as soon as access was possible, to tour the affected areas and provide solutions for document restoration.

Charlotte Stacey from the Emergency Planning department within Oxfordshire County Council was closely involved in supporting the district council in its recovery project. Oxfordshire County Council has long retained Harwell via the Priority User Service, but she adds:

*"It was telling that during this incident, national agencies also recommended Harwell as a contractor of high repute."*

A detailed site survey was undertaken by Harwell's Project Manager of records in each department. Each department had identified within its own business continuity plan its critical documents, and their location, ahead of the incident, but had also added extra records to be retrieved. Levels of damage varied hugely with some records affected by smoke particles only, with others scorched and singed, and some damage from extinguishant water.



After Harwell's estimate was accepted, the recovery process commenced. Documents were safely packaged and transferred to Harwell's restoration facility and processed in accordance with the council's return schedule. They considered how crucial the documents were to each department, with legal and finance records amongst the first to be returned. All the records identified by the council for restoration were successfully treated and returned within just a few weeks.

Adrianna Partridge, South Oxfordshire District Council's Head of Audit, comments:

*"Following our fire at our Crowmarsh site, Harwell worked in incredibly difficult conditions to salvage and recover as many items and documents as possible. Throughout the recovery and restoration timeline, Harwell remained in constant communication to advise and agree on restoration priorities and timeframes for delivery of items and documents. I would have no hesitation in recommending their services to others, and I would like to thank you for the service you provided to us and the professionalism with which it was delivered."*

Kevin Dinsdale, Regional Director of the Major and Complex Loss Team of Crawford's Loss Adjusters, comments:

*"We have been impressed with both Harwell's personal approach to claims as well as their technical skills and expertise. They ensured that vital documents were identified and successfully restored to agreed programmes, and in doing so, safeguarded the service continuity and reputation of the affected organisation."*

