

**Minutes of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Joint Archives Committee
meeting held on 23 June 2020**

Present: Mike Davies (Invitee/Observer), Gill Heath (Chairman), Gill Burnett and
Lorraine Beardmore

PART ONE

28. Declarations of Interest in accordance with Standing Order 16

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

29. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2020

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2020 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

30. Joint Archives Service: Annual Report 2019/20

The Committee considered a joint report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Families and Communities (Staffordshire County Council) and Director of Housing and Community Services (Stoke-on-Trent City Council) giving details of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archives Service: Annual Report 2019/20 (schedule 1 to the signed minutes) which had been produced in accordance with the Joint Agreement between the two Authorities.

The Annual report provided an account and review of the work and performance of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service for the financial year 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

This was the second year of the new three-year planning cycle. Notable achievements towards meeting the strategic objectives in the current Forward Plan 2018-2021 included:- (i) launch of the Staffordshire Tithe Maps online; (ii) delivery of the touring exhibition 'On Your Doorstep' taking collections across Staffordshire; (iii) securing a Round 1 pass from National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) for the revised Staffordshire History Centre project; (iv) continuing to deliver the Asylum and Bawdy Courts projects and; (v) working with a large number of volunteers to deliver projects, cataloguing and indexing of collections.

In addition, the need to close the onsite public service and enable staff to work from home during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic had been completely unexpected. However, their willingness to support the Authorities' response and ability to adapt to the on-going situation was noted.

The Archive and Heritage Service collected detailed statistics about all areas of its work covering personal, distance and online use of the service. The five indicators used to measure performance included:- (i) Use of the Service; (ii) Attendances at Events, Talks, Education and Community Visits; (iii) Volunteer Hours; (iv) Customer Satisfaction

and (v) Collecting Activity. Members noted that personal use had declined by 5% when adjusted to take account of the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. This mirrored a national trend across all Local Authority Archive Services. In addition, some of the Staffordshire websites had seen a dip in activity which was partly attributed to a change in the method of data collection. However, overall, the use of the on-line services had increased by 16% following the high number of hits on the Find My Past webpage.

Attendances at events had been much lower compared to the previous year owing to the absence of external funding. Similarly volunteer hours were down by 9% owing to the suspension of the service during the pandemic. However, Members were pleased to note that customer satisfaction, as measured by the National Distance User Service, for the enquiry service and advance information was high at 96% although no overall customer satisfaction rating was available.

Overall, the service had made good progress against its 10-year vision.

Members noted that the Risk Register had been reviewed and updated in accordance with the recommendations of the Internal Audit inspection undertaken in May 2018. The highest risk rating score (4 out of a possible 9) related to loss or damage of collections and the majority of changes were as a result of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. The Directors highlighted that Risk No. 14 – “Impact of a pandemic on service delivery”, (previously Risk No. 13) had been updated in light of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic including appropriate mitigation measures.

RESOLVED – (i) That the report be received and noted.

(ii) That the revised Risk Register for the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Joint Archive Service be approved.

31. 2019/20 Final Outturn and Predicted Outturn 2020/21

The Committee considered a joint report of the Director of Corporate Services and City Director of Housing and Community Services setting out (i) the final net revenue outturn for the Joint Archive Service for 2019/20 and (ii) the predicted outturn for 2020/21 (schedule 2 to the signed minutes).

Members noted that the final net revenue outturn was £809,000 compared to an approved budget of £634,000 which gave an overspend of £175,000 owing to. This had been as a result of a delay in the delivery of savings from a planned re-organisation of the Archives and Heritage Service and had been absorbed within the Council’s outturn positions rather than the level of Service reserves.

The balance in the General Reserve was £303,000 whereas the balance in the Archive Acquisition Reserve was £57,000 and Art Fund Grant (Minton), £10,000.

With regard to 2020/21, the net spend to date was £126,000 ie approximately 10% of the current Revenue Budget (£655,000). The latest forecast was for an overall overspend of £129,000 at the year’s end owing to continued delays in the delivery of savings from the planned re-organisation of the service which would be slightly offset by a small underspend of £20,000 in the Stoke-on-Trent Sites and Public Services budget

heading. Members noted that in the event the anticipated overspend materialised, the balance would be funded by Staffordshire County Council.

With regard to Reserves it was anticipated there would be a total balance of £350,000 ie approximately £20,000 less than the current position owing to (i) spend on air conditioning works at the City Council's premises (£30,000); (ii) full use of the Art Fund Grant (£10,000) and; (iii) transfer of the above-mentioned underspend (£20,000).

In presenting the report, The Director of Housing and Community Services informed Members that the City Council's review of Service accommodation was on-going and undertook to notify the Committee of their proposals once these had emerged. Therefore, budgeted expenditure on new air conditioning equipment for existing premises would be deferred until such time as plans had been finalised.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received and noted.

(b) That the Final Net Revenue Outturn position for 2019/20 be noted.

(c) That net revenue budget position for 2020/21 be noted.

32. Staffordshire History Centre Project - Update

The Committee considered a report (Schedule 3 to the signed minutes) by the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Families and Communities (Staffordshire County Council) and Director of Housing and Community Services (Stoke-on-Trent City Council) updating them on progress with regard to the Staffordshire History Centre (SHC) Project.

Permission to commence work on the project was granted by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) on 17 December 2019. Since that time, a review of the work programme had been undertaken in response to the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. Proposed changes had subsequently been discussed with the National Lottery Fund (NHLF) who had extended their deadline for submission of Round 2 Applications.

Audience Agency, the consultants who had been appointed to undertake (i) audience research and (ii) develop a marketing strategy for the History Centre had commenced in February 2020. However, following the outbreak, the company had implemented a furlough system for staff which had delayed progress. Therefore, the timetable for completion of the two pieces of work had been extended until the end of July 2020. To date, the company had completed an initial report using data/responses from 776 users which would be used to inform the Business Plan, Activity Plan and Market Strategy. In addition, they had launched an online survey on 20 May 2020 which had elicited 302 responses by 5 June 2020. Doorstep interviews would also be undertaken (subject to social distancing rules) in June 2020 in Abbots Bromley.

With regard to the 'Learning' element of the project, the contract timetable had been extended to 31 July 2020. Alternative methods of working with volunteers had been investigated and a private Facebook group established. However, owing to this channel not being universally liked an online Learning Blog was launched to include updated content throughout each week. In addition, Robin Johnson, Consultant had made

significant progress in establishing partnerships with schools via Entrust Education. An online survey had been sent to schools in the Stafford area with over 50% free school meal and/or English as a Secondary or Foreign Language ratios and feedback to date from those 30 schools which had responded had been overwhelmingly positive. The full results of the survey would be included in the Learning Plan.

Also in support of the Learning element, seven virtual learning sessions had been written with the following themes of (i) Mystery Staffordshire Objects; (ii) Staffordshire Timeline; (iii) Staffordshire Portraits; (iv) Victorian Stafford Gaol; (v) Discover Your Local Area; (vi) Design Your Own Manuscript and (vii) Create Your Own Coat of Arms together with a children's digital evaluation exercise which aimed to generate basic feedback from pupils.

With regard to the 'Conservation' element of the project, a review of the Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for buildings had resulted in five minor amendments being made. The CMP for collections had also recently been completed by the Consultant and was currently being reviewed by the Core Project Team. Both Plans would be completed by the end of June 2020.

With regard to the Design and Implementation element of the project, the Project Team had remained in close contact with the Pringle, Richard, Sharratt Architects who undertook the original design work. A review of their initial work was to be undertaken to incorporate changes necessary arising from the audience research and Activity and Interpretation Plans. In addition, new work had been commissioned to create a habitat for pollinators and wildlife.

The Project Team had also discussed a review of the Implementation Plan to take account of Covid-19, with Imagemakers. The review was to commence following completion of the audience research work and would help to ensure spaces within the Centre were future proofed in the event restrictions remained were in place when the building opened.

Initial work had begun in the Business Plan which would be completed following evaluation of the audience research data, surveys and work on the Activity Plan.

Members noted the following revised key dates for the Project:-

- Presentation of Audience Research to SHC Board by Audience Agency – 22 July 2020;
- Draft Reports review by SHC Project Board – August 2020;
- Mid-Stage Review – Late September 2020;
- Submission of Round 2 Application (assuming sufficient progress made) – 23 November 2020.

With regard to the establishment of a Development Trust, it was hoped that approval from the Two Authorities would be obtained no later than July 2020.

During the discussion which ensued, Members paid tribute to the work of the Directors in maintaining momentum in the Project during the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic. They also stressed the importance of volunteers in ensuring its success and hoped that

engagement could be sustained during the period that lockdown/social distancing restrictions were in place. In response, the Directors said whilst they hoped some face to face contact could be re-instated by September 2020, volunteers would continue to be actively involved remotely/on-line.

RESOLVED – That the report be received and noted.

33. Joint Archives Service: Impact of Covid-19

The Committee considered a report (Schedule 4 to the signed minutes) by the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Families and Communities (Staffordshire County Council) and Director of Housing and Community Services (Stoke-on-Trent City Council) regarding the impact of the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic on the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service.

The introduction of the social distancing measures and the lockdown from late March 2020 had had a profound impact (positive and negative) on the service. Whilst face to face contact with the public had ceased, services had been adapted to maintain access where possible. Staff had continued to work from home and online engagement had dramatically increased providing the potential for sustained development in this area, in the future. However, there had been an estimated 50% reduction in income arising from a lack of visitors, the planned re-structure of the service had been postponed and volunteer numbers were expected to decline.

It was anticipated that cohorts of staff would return to Staffordshire Record Office, William Salt Library and County Museum from 15 June 2020 (depending on risk assessments being completed and implementation of appropriate social distancing measures. This would enable improved remote access to eg photocopying, research and digital photography services. From Mid-July it was hoped that an appointments only/restricted service could be re-introduced in the Reading Room although outreach, talks and engagement activities would continue on-line only for the foreseeable future. In addition, onsite volunteering opportunities would continue to be unavailable. However, free access to Staffordshire content on Find My Past website had been negotiated for volunteers to support research projects.

RESOLVED – That the report be received and noted.

34. Date of next meeting - Thursday 12 November 2020 at 10.30 am, venue to be confirmed

RESOLVED – That the date and time of the next meeting be noted.

35. Exclusion of the public

RESOLVED – That the public be excluded for the following items of business which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) of the Local Government Act 1972 indicated below”.

36. Exempt minutes of meeting held on 6 February 2020

(exemption paragraph 2 and 3)

RESOLVED – That the exempt minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2020 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman

Chairman