

<b>Members Interest</b>
N/A

## **Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Joint Archive Committee 24 June 2021**

### **Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service and Staffordshire Archives and Heritage Service: Annual Report**

#### **Recommendation(s)**

1. That the Committee receive and approve the annual report detailing the work of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent (Joint) Archive Service and Archive and Heritage Service for the period April 2020 to March 2021.
2. The Risk Register for the service is reviewed and agreed.

#### **Report of Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities (Staffordshire County Council) and Director of Strategy and Resources (Stoke on Trent City Council)**

#### **Reasons for Recommendations**

3. The accompanying Annual Report provides an account and review of the work and performance of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service and Archive and Heritage Service for the financial year, April 2020 to March 2021 attached at Appendix 2. In line with internal audit recommendations that the Committee review the Risk Register for the service attached as Appendix 3.

#### **Background**

4. The terms of the Joint Agreement for Archive Services between Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council requires an annual report on the work of the Joint Archive Service to be presented to the Annual Meeting in June. The Annual Report provides a full overview of the range of activities, progress, and performance of the Service. This year it includes the work for the whole of Staffordshire's Archive and Heritage Service.

5. This year's Annual Report evidences some significant achievements towards meeting the overall strategic objectives of the Service within the current Forward Plan, 2021-2024. These objectives are:

- Developing an active partnership approach.
- Delivering resilience and sustainability.
- Reaching and engaging with a wide range of people and building new audiences.
- Sharing knowledge across the UK.
- Increasing our online presence and remote access.

6. The last year has been an exceptional year for the service dominated by the impact of COVID-19. It has also seen a considerable number of staff changes across the service due to a combination of retirements and a long-planned reorganization of the county service. The year saw the first ever suspension of public services, no physical events, all staff working from home and our volunteers unable to visit. Despite this the staff and volunteers in the service rose to these challenges and found new ways of working and engaging with users primarily through an imaginative and inspiring online offer.

7. Whilst most staff were working from home collecting activity changed significantly with far fewer accessions received. The team switched from working directly on collections to improving the information held about them in our catalogues by converting paper catalogues to online entries. 20,000 new entries from well over 1000 separate accessions and representing nearly 600 boxes were added to the online catalogue. Some of this work has been done by volunteers (over 3,100 entries). We also completed the work which started in the last weeks of March 2020 of putting a collection level description online for all uncatalogued accessions, for which we are now at 99.4% of collections with an online description. This is a huge achievement and makes collections far more accessible through searching online.

8. The key achievements of 2020-2021 were:

- Completion of the Asylum and Bawdy Courts Projects
- Recovering services during COVID-19 and digital engagement
- Lockdown Memories
- Staffordshire History Centre

Delivering these projects in such challenging circumstances demonstrates the real commitment to the service shown by staff, volunteers and our partners. This annual report shows how flexible the workforce can be and how archives and heritage collections can be used in different ways to connect individuals and communities and combat loneliness and isolation during a global pandemic.

9. The Archive and Heritage Service collects detailed statistics about all areas of its work shown at the end of Appendix 2 to the annual report. This covers personal use, distance use and online use of the service. There are five local performance indicators which the service measures against:

1. Use of the service
2. Attendances at events, talks, education and community visits
3. Volunteer hours
4. Customer satisfaction
5. Use of collections

10. During 2020/21 in person visits were significantly reduced or zero at sites due to COVID-19 restrictions. Online activity increased and this resulted in more online visits and enquiries. In total this meant use of the service increased by 38% compared to the previous year. There were no physical events, group visits or talks during 2020/21. Two online talks were delivered by museum staff which generated 68 attendances.

11. Onsite volunteering was suspended during the previous year and a new remote offer was developed which engaged approximately 40 volunteers. The number of volunteer hours contributed has reduced by 36% but given the difficult circumstances this is still a really positive level of engagement with the service.

12. Customer satisfaction has been measured through the audience research survey completed this year outlined earlier in the report. Responses rated the current service at 97.5% satisfaction though users wanted to see improvements to the offer. This is a slight increase on the previous year.

13. The indicator for collections has been changed this year to reflect how many items are consulted or on loan. This is to reflect use of the collection rather than how many items are added each year. An outturn for 2019/20 has been calculated to compare against 2020/21. Whilst the number of items on loan dropped slightly the reduction in documents consulted decreased significantly due to onsite service closures as a result of COVID-19. In total it was a 63% reduction.

## **Risk Register**

14. Staffordshire County Council Internal Audit team completed an audit of the Joint Archive Committee in May 2018 and recommended the committee review the risk register on an annual basis. The Risk Register sets out the main risks to the service covering:

- Physical risks to collections
- Risks to digital collections
- Risks to staff, members of the public and volunteers within the service
- Risks to operation of the public service
- Risks to forward planning for the service

15. The register at Appendix 3 sets out the impacts and mitigating actions giving a total risk rating out of 9. Last year the register was significantly updated to take account of changes to risks of a pandemic. The highest category scores are 6 and relate to a new risk concerning staff and home working.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Equalities implications:**

This report has been prepared in accordance with the personnel and equal opportunities' policies of the County Council and the City Council.

### **Legal implications:**

The work of the Archive Service is governed by the Joint Agreement and other legislation to allow both authorities to meet their legal obligations.

### **Resource and Value for money implications:**

The Archive Service delivers a range of work which is measured in a number of ways and detailed in the appendices of the Annual Report.

**Risk implications:**

Risk register for the service has been completed.

**Climate Change implications:**

None applicable

**Health Impact Assessment screening:**

None applicable

**Report author:**

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**List of Background Papers**

Papers	Contact/Directorate/ext number
Annual Report 2020-2021	Joanna Terry/Families & Communities x278370
Archive Service Risk Register 2021	Joanna Terry/Families & Communities x278370