

Minutes of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Joint Archives Committee meeting held on 24 June 2021

Present: Mike Davies (Invitee/Observer), Lorraine Beardmore and Victoria Wilson

Apologies for absence: Mark Sutton

PART ONE

1. Declarations of Interest in accordance with Standing Order 16

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

2. Appointment of Chairman and Vice-Chairman

RESOLVED – (a) That Mrs. V. Wilson be appointed Chairman for the ensuing year until the next Annual Meeting in June 2022.

(b) That Mrs. L. Beardmore be appointed Vice-Chairman for the ensuing year until the next Annual Meeting in 2022.

3. Minutes of meeting held on 25 February 2021

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 February 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

4. Joint Archive Service - 2020/21 Final Outturn and Predicted Outturn 2021/22

The Committee considered a joint report of the Director of Corporate Services (Staffordshire County Council) and Director of Strategy and Resources (Stoke-on-Trent City Council) (schedule 1 to the signed minutes) setting out:- (i) the final net revenue outturn for the Joint Archive Service for 2020/21 and; (ii) the predicted outturn for 2021/22

Members noted that the final net revenue outturn was £742,959 compared to an approved budget of £613,830 which gave an overspend of £129,129. The variance had occurred owing to overspend on:- (i) core services (£52,000) arising from a delay in achieving planned savings pending the re-organisation of the Archives and Heritage Service) and; (ii) sites and public services (£77,000) also arising from a delay in achieving planned savings. However, these were partially offset by an underspend of £63,000 in Stoke-on-Trent Sites and Services budget owing to savings against vacant posts and a reduction on costs associated with the change in service delivery arising from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Members noted that the above-mentioned overspend had been met by the County Council and had not impacted on service provision.

They also noted that the balance in the General Reserve was £365,000 and the balance in the Archive Acquisition Reserve was £58,000. In addition, a specific reserve of £10,000 was held from the Art Fund grant towards the Minton Collection.

With regard to 2021/22, the net spend to date was £121,000 ie 16% of the current Revenue Budget (£763,000). The latest year end position was for an overspend of £7,000. However, in the event that this overspend materialised, it would be met from a County Council central budget rather than the Archives Services General Reserve.

The balance in the General Reserve at 2021/22 year end was predicated to be £189,000.

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

5. Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service and Staffordshire Archives and Heritage Service: Annual Report

The Committee considered a joint report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Families and Communities (Staffordshire County Council) and Director of Strategy and Resources (Stoke-on-Trent City Council) (schedule 2 to the signed minutes) giving details of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archives Service: Annual Report 2020/21 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 2020 to 31 March 2021.

This was the third year of the new three-year planning cycle. Notable achievements towards meeting the strategic objectives in the current Forward Plan 2019-2022 included:- (i) completion of the Asylum and Bawdy Courts Projects; (ii) recovery of services during the Covid-19 pandemic and further development of digital engagement/services; (iii) initiation of the Lockdown Memories Project and; (iv) further development of the Staffordshire History Centre project.

With regard to the Risk Register, this had been reviewed following a recommendation by the County Council's Internal Audit Team in May 2018. The highest risk was identified as Home Working of Staff owing to a lack of equipment, impact on work/life balance and isolation. However appropriate mitigations had been identified. Members noted that of the 16 entries in the Register seven had been 'RAG' rated green (low) and eight amber (medium).

In the discussion which ensued Members then paid tribute to the work of all staff in the Archive and Heritage Service who had made a valuable contribution towards achieving the various objectives set out in the Forward Plan particularly during the difficulties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. In response to a question from a Member the Deputy Chief Executive and Director explained that whilst social distancing regulations were in force, physical engagement with service users was limited. However, whilst demand from the academic community was encouraging, it was expected that in-person work with events and volunteers would not return to normal for at least another twelve months.

Another Member commented to the learning experience gained by the service during lockdown arising from the significant increase in on-line public engagement. In reply, the Deputy Chief Executive and Director referred to efforts currently being made to harness the work of volunteers through on-line initiatives.

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

(ii) That Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archives Service: Annual Report 2020/21 be approved for publication.

(iii) That the draft revised Risk Register for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Joint Archive Service as set out in Appendix 2 to the report be approved.

6. Staffordshire History Centre Project - Update

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

Members learned that a Round Two application for £3.9m grant aid was submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NHLF) on 1 March 2021. This was towards total project costs of £7,148,600.

Members learned that additional information and clarifications regarding specific details of the project were provided to the NHLF Grants Officer during May 2021. In addition, representatives of the NHLF completed a virtual site visit on 28 May at which the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Families and Communities, members of the project board and team, and Chair of the William Salt Library Trust were present.

Whilst a final decision on the application was expected to be received during June 2021, they noted that recent feedback from the NHLF had been positive.

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

That the Joint Committee be informed of the outcome of the Archive and Heritage Service's Round 2 application to National Heritage Lottery Fund for grant aid towards the development of a Staffordshire History Centre as soon as possible.

7. Date of next meeting - Thursday 11 November 2021 at 10.30 am, Venue to be Confirmed

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

Chairman

