

Local Members Interest
N/A

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Joint Archive Committee – Wednesday 02 August 2023

Annual Report

Recommendation(s)

That the Committee:

- a. 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 2022 to March 2023.
- b. The Risk Register for the service is reviewed and agreed.

Report of Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills (Staffordshire County Council) and Director of Strategy and Resources (Stoke on-Trent-City Council)

Reasons for Recommendations:

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 2022 to March 2023 attached at Appendix 1. In line with internal audit recommendations that the Committee review the Risk Register for the service attached as Appendix 2.

Background

1. 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.
2. This year's Annual Report evidences significant achievements towards meeting the overall strategic objectives of the Service within the current Forward Plan, 2021-2024. These objectives are:

- a. Developing an active partnership approach.
 - b. Delivering resilience and sustainability.
 - c. Reaching and engaging with a wide range of people and building new audiences.
 - d. Sharing knowledge across the UK.
 - e. Increasing our online presence and remote access.
3. The last year saw the removal of COVID-19 restrictions enabling the whole Service to fully resume in-person events. Several different types of events were delivered including 'behind the scenes' tours, study days and creative activities. Some online events were maintained such as the Staffordshire History Day to reach a wider audience. The response to events was really positive after several years of interruptions.
4. Both the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent parts of the Service have been working on capital projects involving relocation of the collections. This has meant that there is restricted access to collections, which was not planned to coincide. However, the good practice established during the COVID-19 pandemic is being utilised to offer remote access and assessment on case by case basis for in person visits.
5. Two externally funded projects made significant progress this year. The Pandemic Diary project, funded by Staffordshire County Council, is recording oral history interviews with key staff and members about their experience of the pandemic. Objects and ephemera are being collected to complement the recordings. The Rugeley Power Station project, funded by section 106 money through the planning process, has enabled the Service to take in the archive and produce an exhibition about the power station. There is also a touring pop-up exhibition at local venues in Rugeley and at libraries.
6. Fewer accessions were received at Staffordshire Record Office with a total of 34 for 2022/23. This is due to the Service having moved out of the Record Office and lack of available storage space. More came in for Stoke-on-Trent City Archives receiving 96 for the year. 95 contacts were made with members of the public or organisations about potential deposits with many being deferred until the History Centre and new City Archives are open. The total accessions and approaches were 226.
7. Volunteering resumed at Eastgate House, the County Museum stores and online following the move of the Staffordshire Record Office and William Salt Library team. Their work on collections is supporting the Staffordshire History Centre project and this year over 4,000 hours were received. At Stoke-on-Trent City Archives volunteers were welcomed

back with their work supporting the relocation work including cataloguing and repackaging.

8. 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:
 - a. Use of the service
 - b. Attendances at events, talks, education and community visits
 - c. Volunteer hours
 - d. Customer satisfaction
 - e. Use of collections
9. Overall use of the service increased by 5%, with social media streams contributing to this increase. As there have been closures and access restrictions across the Stafford and Stoke sites, personal visits have reduced compared to the previous year but online visits and social media remained high. The increase has slowed compared to the previous year which was a high figure seen during the Covid-19 pandemic.
10. Engagement with the Service has increased significantly by 466%. This is due to the ability to deliver events, study days, tours of our sites and running activities as part of the History Centre project. Having dedicated project staff also brought the capacity and creativity to the team to enable these events to take place. This is a really significant increase with the dual challenge of responding to Covid-19 restrictions being removed and the lack of a venue for the service during temporary closures.
11. With the resumption of volunteering across the Service the number of hours contributed has increased compared to last year. The 30% increase represents a significant milestone in the work of the teams to ensure people were welcomed back and supported. Based on the National Lottery Heritage Fund rate for skilled volunteers of £20 per hour, the contribution has a monetary value of £93,710.
12. There was no customer survey available for the service to participate in this year. However there have been no formal complaints received and a total of 294 compliments was received. The team were consistently praised for the quality of the responses and timeliness.
13. During 2022/2023 use of collections had declined by 31% which was mainly due to restricted access in place and a lower number of museum items on display.

Risk register

14. Staffordshire County Council Internal Audit team recommend that the committee review the Risk Register on an annual basis. The Risk Register sets out the main risks to the service covering:
 - a. Physical risks to collections
 - b. Risks to digital collections
 - c. Risks to staff, members of the public and volunteers within the service
 - d. Risks to operation of the public service
 - e. Risks to forward planning for the service

15. The register at Appendix 2 sets out the impacts and mitigating actions giving a total risk rating out of 9. The register has been reviewed and updated to include new procedures around lone working at Staffordshire Record Office. The risk on flood or water ingress has been updated to reflect the new storage for Stoke-on-Trent City Archives.

Legal Implications

The Joint Agreement between Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council is reviewed as appropriate for amendments to ensure it covers any changes as a result of the project. There is a rolling review and renewal on a three yearly basis with the agreement last amended in 2021.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

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

Climate Change Implications

The Service balances online access and physical access to services and collections to offer options for remote use and not necessarily travel to multiple locations. Any new buildings will be compliant with modern standards for energy efficiency and minimise impacts on climate change.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Contact Details

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