CLOSING THE GAP

**STAFFORDSHIRE AND STOKE ON TRENT ARCHIVE SERVICE
POLICY AND STRATEGY FOR**

THE PRESERVATION OF DIGITAL RECORDS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The role of the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service is to locate, collect and preserve Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent's irreplaceable written heritage and to make it widely available to the people of the county and its visitors. In order to do this the Service has to ensure that records are preserved and made accessible so that they can be consulted by our users.

1.2 This applies to records of all formats although the bulk of the Record Office's holdings so far have been received in traditional formats such as parchment and paper. However these traditional formats are increasingly being overtaken by the creation of records in electronic format. Most paper records that are deposited or transferred to the Service have existed in electronic format at some point. However some records have only ever existed, and can only be accessed in, digital format. Examples of this are web pages, databases, images, and GIS mapping data.

1.3 In 2006 the Digital Preservation Coalition[1] produced the *Mind the Gap* report which revealed just how serious the risk is of digital information degrading or being lost. Most records in local authorities and even smaller organisations are created in digital format. However, unlike paper records, their maximum lifespan is assumed to be no more than ten years. Digital records can be lost permanently, and instantaneously. The stark warning from this report is that urgent action is needed to ensure the preservation of digital records within Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent.

1.4 Digital preservation is still a developing area, so this policy contains recommendations based on current thinking and the position of the Archive Service at this time.

2. POLICY AIMS

2.1 To address the risk of losing digital archives both within the County and City Councils and from external depositors.

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[1] The Digital Preservation Coalition was established in 2001 to secure the preservation of digital resources in the UK and to work with others internationally to secure our global digital memory and knowledge base.

2.2 To continue to consult with major depositors of archives to establish what digital records they may have (or are creating) that should be permanently preserved.

2.3 To maintain the digital records repository.

2.4 To continue to consult and work with colleagues in Information Governance[2] to ensure the long term preservation of Staffordshire County Council's archives.

2.5 To investigate establishing a digital repository for Stoke on Trent City Archives.

2.6 To mainstream processes for dealing with the receipt of digital records across all Archive Service professionals.

2.7 To continue to identify and encourage deposit of digital holdings from existing and new depositors.

3. POTENTIAL SOURCES OF DIGITAL ARCHIVES

3.1 The main potential source of digital material is that of the two parent authorities: Staffordshire County Council and Stoke on Trent City Council. Staffordshire County Council already has done some work to introduce an electronic document and records management system (EDRMS) lead by the Information Governance section. The EDRMS has been rolled out to a number of services and is a standard corporate system. The Archive Service will continue to maintain links with Information Governance to ensure that digital records held in this system are reviewed and appraised for permanent retention in the same way that it does with paper records.

3.2 The County Council routinely publishes information on its website (Staffordshire Web), Intranet and Extranet. The Archive Service participated in a Web Archiving Pilot in 2012. This enabled the Service to work with the National Archives to assess preservation techniques. It also revealed that the cost of continuing web archiving for Staffordshire would be prohibitive. However the Internet Archive provides a very basic method of capturing most sites. The Archive Service also assessed the County Council website and concluded that many items were of an ephemeral nature and that records were already captured elsewhere.

Our preferred approach for web archives is to nominate sites for preservation by the British Library and continue to monitor the Internet Archive and National Archives UK Web Archive to ensure the local authority sites are captured.

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[2] Information Governance are responsible for the management of Staffordshire County Council's active records and are the lead section on electronic document and records management.

3.3 Other sources of digital archives include deposits from external organisations such as:

- other local authorities
- the Diocese
- the Coroner
- Magistrate Courts
- Parish Councils
- Schools
- Businesses
- Local organisations and individuals.

These organisations will be creating documents in many different formats and different versions of proprietary software. The Archive Service will continue to It discuss the position regarding digital archives with the major depositors.

STRATEGY

4. STORAGE

4.1 Storage of digital archives is as costly, if not more so, that storing traditional archive material. It requires particular conditions and substantial ongoing management to ensure its accessibility for the future.

4.2 Best practice guidelines have been produced by The National Archives on selecting long term preservation of digital archives. Their guidelines recommend that, *the ideal storage is on a network server that is regularly backed up, secure and separate from the main server network*[3]. A digital archive repository has been established with the receipt of archive material.

4.3 The repository sits on the main County Council network and is regularly backed up with back up copies being rotated to ensure offsite storage.

5. PRESERVATION AND MIGRATION

5.1 Preservation of digital archives over a long period of time is a challenge. The two key ways of doing this are
- to standardise the formats of digital records to reliable formats
- to migrate data from old versions to current versions

5.2 Standardising digital records to well-supported proprietary formats represents a viable long term solution. Microsoft, although proprietary, is so well supported that it does allow access to older versions of documents. Image files also have well documented and supported formats such as TIFF which again allow good access over a period of time. The County Council has produced guidance on scanning documents that includes the selection and documentation of the correct

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[3] Selecting Storage Media for Long term Preservation
http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/preservation/advice/digital.htm

formats.[4]Therefore our approach is to define a list of acceptable formats for long term preservation of digital archives.

5.3 Wholesale migration of data would have to be done manually (at the moment) and is therefore an expensive preservation option. It also creates a copy rather than retaining the original digital record. Therefore this option will only be undertaken for proprietary formats that are not well-supported.

6. MAKING DIGITAL ARCHIVES ACCESSIBLE

6.1 Access to digital archives needs to be tightly controlled to ensure the integrity of the original digital record. Therefore it is essential that levels of access are set up to ensure the security of the material. This will work as follows:

- Access to the Shared Area Network will be restricted to named staff within the Archive Service with permissions to add material but not to remove.
- Public access will also be set up for use within the reading rooms again by allowing read only access to certain permitted folders where the records are open for consultation.
- For the longer term plans will be made for eventual access directly through Archive Service online catalogue as the software develops.

6.2 Accessibility depends on the technical capability of the current systems and this will be closely monitored as software and hardware develops.

7. EMERGENCY RECOVERY

7.1 The Archive Service already maintains an emergency plan for the traditional archival holdings held at its storage locations within the county. This plan includes the requirements for any digital records transferred to the Service.

7.2 Staffordshire ICT already has a back procedure in place for the Storage Area Network as follows:

- The servers are in a secure building.
- Two back up copies are taken onto to Digital Linear Tape.
- One copy is stored onsite in the event of immediate need for recovery following a technical problem.
- A second back up copy is stored off site in a fire safe.

8. PRESERVATION OF RECORDS ELSEWHERE

8.1 The Archive Service will continue its policy of offering advice on the preservation of archives to current or potential depositors to include digital archives.

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[4] Staffordshire County Council , Corporate Scanning Policy 2007

8.2 Staffordshire ICT will continue to assist the Archive Service in providing advice on the storage of digital records held by other organisations or private individuals.

9. STRATEGIC POLICY OBJECTIVES 2013-2018

- Continue to monitor contact with key potential depositors of digital archives to ensure that the Archive Service is ready to receive digital deposits.
- Maintain involvement in developments with Staffordshire County Council with regard to future developments of the EDRMS and eventual digital preservation of SCC records.
- Continue to add records to the Digital Archive Repository (DAR)
- Develop and agree protocols for staff access to the DAR and launch public access delivered through the reading rooms of the Archive Service.
- Produce public guidance on preferred file formats for deposit within the Archive Service.
- Investigate setting up a DAR for Stoke on Trent City Archives.
- Continue to monitor the Internet Archive and UK Web Archive as a means of ensuring long term access to Staffordshire County Council and Stoke on Trent City Council historical website pages.
- Continue to monitor current best practice in Digital Preservation.

10. POLICY REVIEW

10.1 This policy will be reviewed in 2018