

| |
|-------------------------|
| Members Interest |
| N/A |

Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Joint Archive Committee 26 March 2015

Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service: Forward Plan and Vision for Service 2015

Recommendation(s)

- 1a. That Vision for the Service for the next ten years is approved by the Committee.
- 1b. The Committee gives approval for the Service to develop delivery options based on the vision to be consulted on formally in the summer.

Report of Director for Place and Deputy Chief Executive (Staffordshire County Council) and Director of People – Assistant Chief Executive (Stoke on Trent City Council)

Reasons for Recommendations

2. The Joint Archive Service has worked to a three year planning cycle since its inception in 1997. The scope of this seventh plan has been extended to ten years as it will transform the service and will take more than three years to deliver some of these changes.
3. This Vision covers the Joint Archive Service and the Museum Service for the County Council. Together the services are known as 'Archives and Heritage'. It has also informed the creation of a vision for the William Salt Library Trust. Their vision will be complementary and is due to be considered by the Trust at their annual meeting in May 2015.

Background

4. In 2014 the Archives Service consulted on a project to centralise its public sites in the county. An application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) was submitted to secure funding for this project but it was rejected in July 2014. Part of the feedback stated that the Service needed a clearer vision for the project. The Service was coming to the end of its current Forward Plan 2012-2015 so the timing to comprehensively review its activities and refocus was appropriate. A Project Board and Project Team were formed in August 2014 to advise and assist with decision making.
5. The Service secured funding from the Strategic Property Board in September 2014 to appoint consultants to:

- Support the development of a new vision and engagement with stakeholders.
- Assist with a conversation about the vision with key partners and stakeholders.
- Support the development of options for delivery of the vision.
- Help the project team to develop and submit a new bid to HLF in 2015.

Janice Tullock Associates were appointed in November 2014 to assist the Project Team.

Developing the Vision

6. The first key milestone to developing the Vision for the Service began at a stakeholder workshop on 8 December facilitated by Janice Tullock and Emma Parsons. The workshop brought together key partners, stakeholders, and staff. It included:

- Trustees of William Salt Library
- Friends of the William Salt Library
- Friends of Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service
- Lichfield Civic Society
- Staff of the Archive and Heritage Service

The workshop was successful in bringing people together to discuss the challenges the Service faces. It started to develop some key themes and ideas for how the Service will address these challenges and achieve sustainability.

7. Based on the results of the workshop a draft vision was produced in January 2015 and shared with staff, the stakeholder group, and partners. The draft was amended and then shared during February for a public 'conversation' to test the Vision and gain wider input into its development. This took place from 11 – 25 February using an online survey and discussion boards at 11 venues across the county and city (Record Offices and Libraries). The survey link was sent to many special interest groups and the stakeholders already involved, a press release was issued, it was advertised on the homepage of the Archive Service website, and social media was used to promote it throughout February.

Results of the conversation

8. The digital survey had 184 responses with 7 additional written responses, 191 in total. The discussion boards were less successful with only 12 responses. This gives a total of 203 responses from people across the county, the vast majority being existing users of archives. A summary of the findings and key areas of support and concern is given below.

9. Overall there was support for the vision. Respondents supported the idea of Active Partnership and reaching new and more people. People valued the expertise and service delivered by staff. They agreed with the idea of sharing

knowledge but thought that it should be a two way process. There was support for more online content but it was felt it should have good quality indexing and catalogues as well. There was recognition that there is potential to do more with existing partners and new ones spoken to so far.

10. A number of areas of concern were raised through the conversation about the draft vision. Respondents stated that volunteers must not replace staff expertise but this did not mean that people were unwilling to be involved with the Service. There was much concern about the future of Lichfield Record Office and around keeping access local. People were clear that maintaining physical access to records was important to them and that digital access did not work for everyone. Some people commented on the need to prioritise areas in the vision in terms of resourcing it. For future consultations respondents asked for openness and for comments to be taken real note of.

The amended Vision

11. Using the results of the conversation the Vision has been amended to ensure that the right emphasis and balance is achieved. It is an ambitious and challenging vision dependent on achieving grant funding to resource it. The key themes are outlined below with the full vision at Appendix 2.

12. Our vision is: ***Connecting people to the collected stories and heritage of Staffordshire, Stoke on Trent and beyond.***

Our mission is: ***To Connect people to the memories of Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent, by engaging them with the collections we develop and preserve for current and future generations.***

These statements bring together the service focus on both archive collections and museum objectives recognising that many users do not understand why there are or should be a distinction between the two. They focus on people engaging with collections and putting that at the heart of our vision.

The Service is developed by an Active Partnership between Councils, users, depositors, partners, volunteers in all areas of the service including: funding, management and delivery.

13. This theme seeks to really involve partners and users in our Service by empowering them and also supporting them with training to enable them to gain something more from volunteering. It recognises that the Service needs to be delivered in different ways to ensure its sustainability for the future. It also seeks to diversify the funding model for the Service. Comments on this part of the vision included:

“Volunteers should supplement the current staff not replace them”

“...an expanded volunteer programme is a great idea, and I can see that Staffordshire really are a beacon of working with volunteers. The idea to enable volunteers to gain qualifications is fantastic and demonstrates real care for the community and a commitment to education and learning”

40% of respondents supported all aspects of this theme. The activity statements have been amended to make it clear that volunteers will add value to the service alongside the professional staff team.

The Service has been re-shaped and redesigned to encourage resilience, new ways of working and refocusing delivery to the needs of users.

14. This outcome focuses on ensuring that the service is stable and financially solvent. It places strong emphasis on ensuring that all collections are properly cared for in buildings which are developed to provide services in a more cost effective way. This theme also includes activity to take the service beyond its buildings through outreach and online delivery where it can reach more and new people. Comments on this theme included:

“I support much of this in principle, but would hate to see the William Salt townhouse outside the public estate. Making more available online is definitely a good thing.”

“The service needs to be financially solvent and to secure this will only be sustainable if easy access is maintained for the general public”.

49% of people supported all or most of the statements under this section. Significant numbers of people also mentioned seeing more information online but with the proviso of physical access to documents remaining. People also wanted to see more community activity. The vision has been re-ordered to make it clear that there will still be a physical service and care of collections remains integral to this area.

The Service has diversified its users, stakeholders and collections. This has resulted in increased visibility and understanding of the service by the public and increased levels of new users. People are proud of the Staffordshire History Centre.

15. This area focuses on reaching more and different people using different ways of engagement. This will include working with community groups, using social media, browsing collections, developing a strong learning programme and delivering cross-disciplinary exhibitions. The desired outcomes are increased awareness of the service by new users and relevance for residents within the County and City. Comments on this theme included:

“Digitising the collection is clearly a long term plan and the existing arrangements at Lichfield should not be changed until a better outcome can be demonstrated for all of the collection.”

“Archives are no longer about the completely physical – they have to embrace new technologies to reach more people and raise the profile of our rich heritage; all ages need to be shown what is available and to explore historical items in contexts that bring them alive and make them vivid.”

This outcome received support for all aspects from 80 people with some wanting to see activities that increased the reach of the service across the county.

The Service shares knowledge on new ways of working with other services

16. The activity in this area covers sharing our knowledge with our professional sectors. It also includes working with the voluntary sector to develop volunteering programmes. We will also share our knowledge with museums and organisations within the county. In addition we will enable our users to share their knowledge onsite and online. Comments included:

“Support this, but remain dubious about how deliverable this is.”

“I would support all of these aspects, they are aspirational and attainable, and above all valuable to Staffordshire people.”

83 people supported all or most aspects of this area of the plan. There were very varied suggestions on what to do differently in particular around focusing on groups other than local history organisations to reach new people.

The Service has increased its activity online and is delivering more services online.

17. This outcome is focused on using digital access to increase participation and as a means to attract non-traditional users. It does not exclude physical access and highlights development of digital access points in partnership with other venues. It will build on the good work already started with social media and look at ways of delivering access to more services online. A digitisation programme is a key element to be developed assessing what the priorities are and the type of delivery method. Comments included:

“has it been thoroughly costed?”

“good blend of real world and digital goals”

“The ceramic community would be very interested – makers, academics and collectors. There’s a lot of makers now working with collections, I would love to do it!”

79 people supported all or most of the activities with some stating the need to improve the content and functionality of the website.

18. Partners (both current and potential) were also consulted about the vision. These included Arts Council England, Keele University, Stafford College, Entrust School Improvement Division. All of the partners were supportive and enthusiastic about the vision and contributed many ideas about how to develop and deliver it. Arts Council England suggested talking to other county providers who are also looking at how to deliver a resilient county-wide service.

Conclusion and next steps

19. It is clear that there was general support for the draft Vision. People felt it was an exciting and sensible vision for the future. There was support for getting more people involved in using the service and having a say in its development. Respondents felt this should not replace staff rather that it should add value. Sharing knowledge was supported as long as it was a two way process. Whilst there was support for more online content it was clear that physical access was still important too. People stated that local access was also important as travelling to archive services could sometimes be problematic.

20. The vision has been amended to reflect some of the feedback from the conversation, from staff, and from partners. The next step is to develop delivery options for some parts of the vision which will focus on resilience and best use of buildings. Other options will be developed for service delivery online, around the county and engaging users.

21. These options will be discussed and shaped with stakeholder groups in Stafford and Lichfield. Preferred options which are realistic and practical will be identified and then consulted on formally in the summer. The comments about the conversation will be taken on board and this next phase of consultation will be longer and widely advertised.

22. A progress report on the project will be brought to the Joint Archive Committee in June.

Appendix 1

Equalities implications:

The Vision focuses on delivery in using online and physical access with delivery around the county and working in partnership with other providers and venues.

Legal implications:

A three year Forward Plan is required for the Joint Agreement between the two authorities. The Vision will also support Archive Accreditation and development of the Heritage Lottery bid for funding.

Resource and Value for money implications:

The Vision and development of delivery options will be used to help restructure and transform the Archive and Heritage Service to ensure that it has the right roles and skills for delivery and sustainability in the future. It will enable delivery of savings identified in the MTFS of £155,000 and take into account future anticipated savings. Staff and trade union representatives will continue to be engaged in the development of this work and consultation will be entered into as appropriate

Risk implications:

The vision is not fully funded and depends on securing external funding, income generation and other fundraising. In developing delivery options alternative plans will be created to take account of not securing grant funding.

Climate Change implications:

The Vision 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.

Health Impact Assessment screening:

The Vision offers opportunities for volunteers to get involved and add value to the service with support and accredited training programmes from staff. Volunteering provides many social benefits for individuals which can impact positively on health.

Report author:

Author's Name: Joanna Terry, Head of Archives and Heritage
Telephone No: (01785) 278370
Room No: Staffordshire Record Office

List of Background Papers

| Papers | Contact/Directorate/ext number |
|--------|--------------------------------|
|--------|--------------------------------|

| | |
|--|--|
| Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archives and Heritage Vision 2015 | |
|--|--|

| | |
|--|--|
| Findings of Staffordshire Archives and Heritage Conversation on the Draft Vision for the Service | |
|--|--|