

Minutes of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Joint Archives Committee meeting held on 22 October 2015

Present: Ben Adams (Chairman), Terry Follows (Vice-Chairman) and Mike Davies (Invitee/Observer)

Apologies for absence: Ian Parry

PART ONE

9. Declarations of Interest in accordance with Standing Order 16

No declarations at this meeting.

10. Minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2015

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2015 be agreed and signed by the Chairman.

11. Staffordshire History Centre: consultation findings and update

The Committee received a joint report (Schedule 1 to the signed minutes) updating them on the Staffordshire History Centre consultation findings. Following the development of a 10 year vision for the service in conjunction with staff, partners, Friends' groups, local history groups and volunteers of Staffordshire Archives and Heritage, nine initial options for delivery were reduced to four options which were taken forward for wider public consultation over an eight week period in the summer of 2015.

Members noted that responses to the options and about priorities for the future service were gathered via a survey. The survey was also discussed with 450 people at eleven drop in sessions at public venues and with a forum of representatives from organisations that have archives deposited with the service (21 attendees). Promotion of the process was wide with 10,000 leaflets and 1,000 posters distributed at community venues across all eight districts, local press coverage and extensive social media coverage as well as links from the Service's online pages. The consultation was commended by the National Archives for the lengthy period and extensive process undertaken by the County Council.

A large number of comments were made on each of the options and on the proposals as a whole. The majority of responses were overwhelmingly supportive for Option A with 196 people commenting that the option was good, realistic or viable. The next popular comment was that it was important to retain the character of and access to the William Salt Library. However people did express concerns around travelling to Stafford and parking in the town. There was also disappointment that the current Lichfield Record Office would close although the replacement access point was welcomed.

Since the Project Board meeting in early September Option A had been developed further to add more detail to the proposal. The William Salt Library Trust (the main project partner) was currently receiving mentoring and support from the Princes Regeneration Trust (PRT). PRT facilitated a workshop with trustees, Friends of the

William Salt Library, representatives from Stafford Borough Council (for planning and building conservation), an architect from a local firm working pro bono and some Archive Service staff to look at the options for the site in the light of Option A as the preferred option. The workshop explored the issues facing the service and also the space in Stafford town centre identifying challenges and opportunities for the project.

Members noted details in the outline proposal for the activity programme for the Staffordshire History Centre including: the community offer; digital offer; community history area to be developed at Lichfield Library; exhibitions offer; and a fall back option would be developed in parallel with Option A if the Archive Service do not get HLF funding. Members were shown draft designs for Option A and the Chairman asked that costings for the William Salt Library area proposals be shown separately. They noted that the HLF application would be submitted by 10 December 2015, considered by the Board in March 2016 and the decision would be made soon after.

RESOLVED – (a) that the results of the consultation be accepted and noted by the Committee.

(b) that the Joint Archive Committee approves the development of Option A for first stage submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) in December 2015.

12. Predicted Outturn 2015/16

The Committee considered a joint report on the predicted outturn for the Joint Archive Service for 2015/16 (Schedule 2 to the signed minutes).

The Finance Officer informed Members that the predicted outturn for the Service showed an expected spend of £686,463 compared with an approved budget of £690,820. This would give an overall underspend of £4,357 which would be transferred to the General Reserve at the end of the financial year.

Members noted that this would give the General Reserve a current balance of £122,659; and the Archive Acquisition Reserve a balance of £57,542. They also noted the request for a further £50,000 of the General Reserve to support the current Heritage Lottery Fund bid (initially £50,000 had been approved and ear marked) and would increase the Joint Archives 'match funding' contribution to £100,000 in total towards the current Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) bid. Following a question from a Member they noted that the HLF bid did not limit the Archives service seeking extra funding from other avenues for the project.

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

(b) That the request to use a further £50,000 from the Joint Archive Service General Reserve to support the current Heritage Lottery Fund bid be approved.

13. Review of Fees and Charges 2016/17

The Committee received a joint report (Schedule 3 to the signed minutes) on the review of fees and charges from April 2016. The Head of Archives and Heritage circulated two

additional appendices detailing joint archives income from 2013-16 at the meeting, for information.

Members noted that the Archive Service fees and charges had been reviewed on an annual basis for a number of years to allow the Service to adapt its services according to demand and cost of provision.

The standard sources for income generation for the Archive Service were: a range of copying services; the sale of photographic permits; research, transcription and certification services; sales of publications; donations; and fees for talks by and group visits to the Archive Service. In addition, from 2014 the Archive Service had benefitted from income from its partnership with a commercial provider to make key archive collections available online. Each year the Service reviews its fees and charges based on: staff time to deliver the service; cost of equipment and associated maintenance; postage costs; economic climate; changing technology; and availability of resources online.

The review was intended to be a balanced approach which encourages use of services whilst still ensuring that income is generated to support the running of such services. This year the main change to the fees and charges had been the increase of the research fee as this involves staff time. This fee was the basis for other charges and therefore other fees would be increases in line including: (a) research fee; (b) quick research fee and Hospital Records search fee; (c) Marriage bond search fee; (d) Certification fee; (e) copies of wills; (f) in house photography charge; (g) publication fees; and (h) talks and visits charges.

Members noted that, despite the availability of parish registers online since July 2014, some researchers still requested a search by staff. Since August 2015 90% of the parish registers were now online and the wills and marriage bonds were due to go online by the end of the year. The Service would continue to advise users to take advantage of the online service free at a library in the County or City. However users would be advised that a request for a search by staff would incur a fee based on the time taken to search and download, print or copy the relevant document(s) and advice on the next steps for research. The proposed fees and charges were recommended for approval as they represent a fair and reasonable increase.

RESOLVED – that the fees and charges proposed in the report be approved for introduction by the Joint Archive Service from April 2016.

14. Appraisal and Disposal Policy

The Committee received a joint report (Schedule 4 to the signed minutes) on the Appraisal and Disposal Policy. The Archive Service had recently revised its existing internal Appraisal Policy to take account of new guidance produced in 2015 by the National Archives on Deaccessioning and Disposal. The existing policy had been substantially revised and extended to become a policy statement as well as setting out guidelines for professional staff. This policy would also support Service's work towards achieving Archives Accreditation.

Members noted that the policy provided a framework to enable archivists to use professional judgement in making decisions about the permanent preservation of records within the context of the Archive Service Collections Development Policy and Strategy (approved in 2013). Appraising collection decisions were made on how far a collection meets the Service's policy and whether it was worthy of permanent preservation. In making these decisions archivists would also bear in mind current and potential use of collections for research using their familiarity with recent research to inform this practice.

Assessment of collections had always taken place primarily at the initial stage of deposit or donation. Before a collection was formally accessioned it was assessed by an archivist to remove material that does not fit the Collections Development Policy or is duplicated or held elsewhere. Material was either returned to the depositor/donor, another repository or as a last resort destroyed.

Members noted that there were other collections which had been held and catalogued by the Archive Service for a number of years. The initial appraisal may not now meet the current selection criteria in the Collection Policy or a more suitable repository may now be available. In this instance a retrospective appraisal or reappraisal may be suitable for these collections (for example - records taken in before archive services were established in the parts of Staffordshire now in the West Midlands). The policy also proposed the development of a programme of reappraisal or retrospective appraisal of collections agreed by the Service management team. The National Archives guidance provides a decision tree to aid the process of assessing suitability for deaccessioning (detailed in the report). As this could involve re-visiting previous decisions made by archivists it was recommended that this was signed off as a delegated decision by the Chairman / Vice-Chairman (as appropriate) of the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Joint Archives Committee.

RESOLVED - That the Appraisal and Disposal Policy (Appendix 2 to Schedule 4 to the signed minutes), be approved for introduction by the Joint Archive Service.

15. Date of next meeting - 18 February 2016 at the County Records Office, Eastgate Street, Stafford

RESOLVED – That the next meeting of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Joint Archive Committee be held on Thursday 18 February 2016 at 10.30 am at the County Records Office, Eastgate Street, Stafford.

Chairman