

Members Interest
N/A

Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Joint Archive Committee 25 February 2021

Review of Forward Plan 2021

Recommendation(s)

1. That the Committee approve the review of the Forward Plan for the Service and note progress so far.

Report of Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities (Staffordshire County Council) and Director of Housing and Community Services (Stoke on Trent City Council)

Reasons for Recommendations

Background

2. The Joint Archive Service has worked to a three-year planning cycle since its inception in 1997. In 2015 the scope of the plan was extended to ten years to encompass significant transformation of the service which would take longer than three years to deliver. The ten-year Plan was reviewed in 2018 and has been updated in 2021 to reflect progress made so far.

3. The 2015-2018 plan was developed with stakeholders, partners, and Friends groups. Public consultation informed the themes of the plan and it was approved by the Joint Archive Committee on 26 March 2015. The second review was approved on 3 April 2018.

4. The 2021 updated Forward Plan covers the County Council's Joint Archive Service and the Museum Service Together the services are known as 'Archives and Heritage'. The ten-year Plan has been reviewed and updated to reflect progress made so far. A summary of progress for 2018-2021 is given below and the amendments for the following three years. The revised Plan is at Appendix 2.

Background, partners and context headlines

5. The list of key partners has been reviewed and expanded to include Staffordshire, Liverpool and Nottingham Universities as projects and placements have taken place with these institutions. Stafford College has been added to reflect planned activity for the Staffordshire History Centre project which will include delivery of learning sessions and placements. Ceramics collector groups have become important partners for Stoke on Trent City Archives supporting conservation and repair of collections such as the Shelley Group. The Hub at St Mary's Lichfield is a key partner for the delivery of the History Access Point in Lichfield. Our Friends and volunteer groups continue to deliver support for our service and the impact of COVID-19 on their numbers and working remotely has been included.

6. The context headlines have been updated and expanded to include the project vision, aims and objectives for the Staffordshire History Centre. This project was a direct response to the vision. A round two application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for £3.9m of funding will be submitted by 1 March 2021 with a decision due in June.

7. The graphic with the service points has been updated to include the Lichfield History Access Point (HAP) which opened in December 2018. The HAP includes local history books, microform and online resources within a space in Lichfield Library at St Mary's.

8. Information on the collections, buildings, outreach, volunteers, partnerships and resources has been updated with current statistics and key achievements. This includes increasing online access to resources such as Find My Past, Staffordshire Past Track and Staffordshire Name Indexes

Vision and mission statement

9. The vision and mission statement remain current for the service and complements the one developed for the SHC project.

Developing an Active Partnership approach

10. The partnership between the Archives and Heritage Service and William Salt Library Trust is strong and they remain committed to the shared vision for the Staffordshire History Centre project.

11. Further consultation and audience research has taken place during 2019-2020 to strengthen and confirm plans for the Staffordshire History Centre. This activity included:

- Stakeholder meetings and discussion with Friends groups prior to submission of the round 1 application.
- Consultation with partners on the digital offer
- Audience research survey May-June 2020 followed up with focus groups on Zoom.
- Learning online survey followed up with Zoom focus groups for potential delivery with partners.
- Piloting digital learning materials with schools.

In total 537 participants took part in consultation organised by the service.

12. Engagement with volunteers peaked at 135 in March 2020 however it was then impacted by COVID-19. During subsequent lockdowns 45 people continued to volunteer remotely working on materials copied by staff or completing research for blogs. This has been difficult to sustain both in terms of staff time for copying material and effectively engaging volunteers who are reluctant to use new technology. A variety of approaches is used including: email, Facebook groups, Zoom, and telephone calls. Face to face volunteer offers valuable social interaction which is missing for people during current restrictions.

13. Plans for the Staffordshire History Centre include new roles for volunteers supporting delivery of the Activity Plan. As part of the plans 102 volunteers will be trained and an estimated 4,803 days will be contributed at a value of £721,050 over the 4 years of the life of the project.

14. Key priorities for this area will be recovering face to face volunteering onsite once COVID-19 restrictions have eased. Recruitment of volunteers and development of a new network for the Staffordshire History Centre project are also key priorities. The text in this section of the plan has been slightly changed to emphasise delivery in the next phase of work.

Resilience and sustainability

15. The major achievement for resilience and sustainability is the submission of the National Lottery Heritage Fund round 1 application and the work to complete the round two application in March. In addition a service review has been completed to re-organise the workforce to meet the service vision to deliver MTFS savings and financial sustainability.

16. During the COVID-19 national lockdown cataloguing and indexing by staff and volunteers has continued. All Staffordshire Record Office collections now have some description on Gateway (which is a major achievement for Archive Service Accreditation). Volunteers have made substantial progress with indexing of wills and the Bawdy Courts project resulting in new additions for the Staffordshire Name Indexes website.

17. External funding for the Asylums and Bawdy Courts projects was extended into Spring to enable both to catch-up following the first COVID-19 lockdown. Both projects have attracted Collaborative Doctoral Award funding which enables PhD students to support the projects. This gives additional resource for three years beyond the timeframe of the initial grants and increases impact.

18. Throughout 2020 we developed a business case to review the storage provision within the County Service taking account of an internal review of storage. This business case looked at options to increase the storage at the History Centre from two to four floors and to facilitate the move of material from our outstore into the new facility. The costs have been modelled and it was formally approved by Cabinet on 17 February 2021.

19. There have been no changes made to the text of this section of the plan. The emphasis will be on securing grant funding to deliver the next phase of work.

Reaching and engaging new audiences

20. The key achievements in this section included the completion of the First World War Centenary programme concluding with the final conference in 2019. This five-year programme of activity delivered:

- Ten conferences with 478 attendees in total
- Sixteen Staffordshire County Council supported projects
- £255,000 of external funding

- Over 373,000 people were engaged

21. Plans for the activities to be delivered in the Staffordshire History Centre project have been tested and piloted. This has included several touring exhibitions:

- The Arts Council England funded touring exhibition 'Through the Eyes of a Child' which reached over 26,000 visitors.
- The Ancient High House in Stafford hosted our 'Retail Revisited' exhibition between October 2019 and January 2020.
- We put on our first exhibition 'Distinctive Staffordshire' at the Staffordshire Record Office in the summer of 2019.
- Delivery of 'Lockdown Memories' contemporary collecting and on-line engagement 2020-21

22. A new exhibition was also planned for spring 2020. A volunteer group was established to research the content and contribute blog posts about their discoveries. In addition, we set up a series of events that would run throughout the exhibition. Following its launch on 7th March 2020 the exhibition closed as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions. The learning from development of this and previous exhibitions contributed to the revised Activity and Interpretation Plans.

23. Using the audience research and consultation (see point 11 above) the Activity and Interpretation Plans for the Staffordshire History Centre project have been substantially reviewed and rewritten. The plans cover a four-year programme including reaching new audiences through outreach events and community projects. The Interpretation Plan outlines how collections will be viewed at exhibitions both onsite at the SHC and through touring exhibitions. A Marketing Plan for the History Centre has been developed alongside a Business Plan for the project.

24. This section of the Forward Plan has been substantially revised and simplified. Sitting beneath it are detailed plans for implementation of the activity and interpretation programmes of work.

Sharing knowledge across the sector

25. The Archive and Heritage Service contributes to the wider sector working with several different organisations. It is an active member of Archives West Midlands with two county council staff as trustees including Chair of AWM. Members of staff have presented at two conferences during the year to an academic conference and to the Rural Museum Network.

26. The service has delivered the Wellcome Trust funded Asylums project which has shared knowledge across academics, volunteers and wider communities both within and beyond Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent.

27. This section of the plan remains unchanged with further opportunities to share knowledge and develop case studies arising from future grant funded projects.

Online presence and remote access

28. There has been substantial progress on the development of an online presence and delivery of remote access for the service. The key achievements include:

- Joining Dorset-led consortium for purchase of Preservica, digital preservation system for born-digital archives and other digital objects
- Addition of c.60,000 catalogue records to Gateway to the Past online catalogue, with emphasis on the William Salt Library and former Lichfield Record Office collections
- Six new or extended indexes added to the Staffordshire Name Indexes website
- Developed innovative digital engagement with volunteers during the pandemic such as the Learning Room site.
- Developed a plan for the new website, integrating online catalogue, blogs, events programme with ticket sales, online shop, local studies resources, and user-generated content in consultation with stakeholders.

29. This section of the plan has not been revised with the key emphasis being on delivery of the new website in the next phase.

The year ahead

30. The plans for 2021/2022 are focussed upon recovering the service from the impact of COVID-19. Key to this will be recovering face to face engagement and re-establishing onsite volunteering. This will include using a variety of methods of engagement (online, video, newsletters) to restore confidence in face to face contact. Risk assessments will be reviewed to ensure the service is supporting volunteers and visitors encouraging them to visit our COVID secure spaces.

31. The other key areas of activity will be securing external funding to deliver the Staffordshire History Centre project. Depending on the outcome of the application to the Heritage Fund the service will implement the project or review it to deliver an alternative option. The Service will also implement the new staffing structure for the County Service.

Appendix 1

Equalities implications:

A wide range of stakeholders have been engaged in development of planned activities for the externally funded Staffordshire History Centre project.

Legal implications:

The Forward Plan is required under the terms of the terms of the Joint Agreement which is reviewed and amended as required by both authorities.

Resource and Value for money implications:

The delivery of the Staffordshire History Centre will enable the Archive and Heritage Service to achieve its MTFS savings and a sustainable model for the future.

Risk implications:

Some of the planned activity is dependent on external funding. A Fundraising Strategy is in place for the Service. The impact of COVID-19 has been considerable, and it may take longer than anticipated to recover all aspects of onsite services. Future restrictions may also impact.

Climate Change implications:

The Forward Plan includes activities to promote online access as well as physical access to services and collections. This provides 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 project 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:

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List of Background Papers

Papers	Contact/Directorate/ext number
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Appendix 3 Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service Vision