

Local Members' Interest
N/A

**STAFFORDSHIRE AND STOKE-ON-TRENT JOINT ARCHIVES COMMITTEE
16 JUNE 2011**

**JOINT REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND DIRECTOR OF
PLACE (STAFFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL) AND THE DIRECTOR OF ADULT
AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES (STOKE-ON- TRENT CITY COUNCIL)**

**STAFFORDSHIRE AND STOKE-ON-TRENT ARCHIVE SERVICE:
RESULTS OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES ASSESSMENT OF
LOCAL AUTHORITY ARCHIVE SERVICES, 2010 AND RESULTS OF SURVEY OF
VISITORS TO BRITISH ARCHIVES, 2011**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To report to the Committee the outcome of the National Archives Assessment for the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent (Joint) Archive Service of completed during the summer of 2010. To also report the results of the Survey of Visitors to British Archives carried out in February 2011.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Since 2006 The National Archives introduced a self assessment process to enable it to discharge its legal functions in relation to the inspection and monitoring of local authority archive services.
- 2.2 The Archive Service's submission for the 2010 self assessment was completed last summer. The overall performance bandings are 1-4 four star ratings with an overall 'league' table of results published. The Joint Archive Service has been judged as a four star service and as such, is one of the leading local authority archive services in England and Wales retaining its tenth position within the Local Authority League tables.
- 2.3 In February 2011 the Archive Service participated in the national Survey of Visitors to British Archives. The survey is run under the auspices of the Public Services Quality Group: Quality Forum for Archives and Local Studies, and it is carried out every 18 months. The statistics are interpreted and externally validated by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance (CIPFA).
- 2.4 Twelve individual areas of service provision and delivery are covered by the survey, so providing regular trend data for the Service over a period of time. The ratings allocated by the respondents are: very good; good; adequate; poor; and very poor. In calculating its overall customer satisfaction rating, the Service combines the very good and good ratings.

- 2.5 The overall satisfaction rating for the Service has been constant at 98% for several years however this year it has increased to 100%. This result reflects the high quality service and its appreciation by service users.
- 2.6 The main results and conclusions for the National Archives Assessment are outlined in sections 4 and 5 of this report and within Appendix 1. Similarly the Survey of Visitors to British Archives results and conclusions are in the same sections and within Appendix 2 to this report.

3. RECOMMENDATION

That the report be received and noted.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 Results of the National Archives Self – Assessment

- 4.1.1 The National Archive assessment focuses on five functional areas of archive service provision and delivery. The information and evidence submitted by local archive services is scored by The National Archives and is moderated by an external assessment panel. The National Archives may also pursue individual questions separately with services should they require further clarity.
- 4.1.2 The functional areas of service provision and delivery examined by the self assessment process are: governance; the documentation of collections; access and outreach services; preservation and conservation; and buildings and environment. The questions were broadly similar to those of the 2008 assessment. However there were additional questions to investigate the provision for the receipt and management of born digital archives.
- 4.1.3 As a multi- repository service, the Joint Service is required to submit information for each of its three record offices: Staffordshire Record Office, Lichfield Record Office and Stoke on Trent City Archives. Information is also supplied on its out store at Northfields in Stafford for the buildings and environment section of the assessment. However the final score and performance banding is an overall one for the whole service. The performance bands for the overall score take into account both the absolute score received and the consistency of performance on the five areas examined.
- 4.1.4 The Archive Service achieved an overall score of 81% which was an increase of 2% compared with the 2008 assessment. When compared to the 2006 assessment this is an increase of 8.5 % and shows sustained improvement. The Service also achieved a four star performance rating in three out of the five areas examined. The four star performance bands were achieved in: governance, which includes planning, policies, service responsibilities, performance and use of resources; preservation and conservation; and the documentation of collections which includes cataloguing and the ongoing

work to reduce cataloguing backlogs. In buildings and environment and access and outreach services which include public services and audience development the Service achieved a three star rating.

- 4.1.5 For the Archive Service significant progress has been shown in the Buildings and environment section in part due to the buildings improvement plan. Work under this plan has included conservation cleaning and a rolling programme of wrapping and boxing of certain types of archive material. This programme is carried out across the service. The construction of the new outstore at Beaconside will help support continued improvement in this area. However it is vital that further progress is made as many archive services have now obtained new buildings which dramatically improve their ratings.
- 4.1.6 The other areas which have also shown good progress are documentation of collections and preservation and conservation where the Service ranks fourth and fifth respectively. This can be attributed to the continuing work to address cataloguing backlogs and include more collection level descriptions in the online catalogue. This work has increased the proportion of collections which have a description. In addition the work to set up a digital archive repository and produce guidelines for managing these records has helped to improve the score for preservation and conservation work.
- 4.1.6 Surprisingly the area which received the lowest score is Access and Outreach which is an area where the Service has traditionally performed well. Despite the varied and busy outreach programme on offer the Archive Service has struggled to attract more school groups and also not managed to make as much progress as it would have liked in targeting hard to reach groups. The constraints of maintaining a public service and progressing work to reduce cataloguing backlogs, means that work in this area is sometimes restricted.
- 4.1.7 The Service has already completed some analysis of its 2010 assessment to identify areas to enable it to improve and to hopefully maintain its rating as a four star service. The Joint Archive Service will also receive an onsite inspection from The National Archives in the autumn of 2011.

4.2 Results of Survey of Visitors to British Archives 2011

- 4.2.1 In February 2011 the Archive Service participated in the national Survey of Visitors to British Archives. The Survey occurs every 18 months and in the intervening year the service completes its own survey using the same methodology. The overall satisfaction rating for the service is measured through this survey by adding the responses for good and very good together. In Staffordshire the number of returns completed for the Service overall was 393 compared to 368 in 2009. The increased response rate was partly due to the survey being carried out during a busier period and also improved promotion of the survey.
- 4.2.2 Reasons for using the Archive Service were varied with family history as the most popular at 77%. Other reasons included 10% of users as part of their formal employment and 9% as students or researchers. This shows the broader and practical application of the use of the service.

- 4.2.3 The user profile remains constant when compared to previous surveys. The age range is predominantly in the 55-74 age which represented 67% of respondents. Over 75s equates to 6% of respondents. Only 11% of those surveyed were aged under 45. The gender profile split is almost equal which is the same as previous survey results. New users represented 28% of the respondents showing that there is continued interest in the service and a slight increase compared to previous results. 19% of those surveyed had been using the service for between five and ten years, while 18% had been using the service over ten years. Of the respondents 13% reported a disability of some kind which shows the importance of the service continuing to ensure its services are accessible for its range of users.
- 4.2.4 Analysis of the postcode data revealed that 62 % of users had travelled within the county but significantly 38% had come from outside Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent. This shows the broader appeal of the service and how it encourages visitors to the county and city. In addition those using the service also contribute to the local economy by using other services and generating a secondary spend. 45% of respondents said they would eat out locally, 70% would use local shops and services and 20% planned to visit other places of interest in the area. 9% of those surveyed would actually stay overnight in connection with their visit.
- 4.2.5 The main results for the twelve categories for the service as a whole were excellent, showing improvements in all categories except for one which remained the same at 99%. What was particularly pleasing is that the rating for the website has increased by 4% reflecting the amount of work put into the site to improve its structure and also the addition of the Staffordshire Name Indexes website. The rating of the service overall (our customer satisfaction measure) was 100% which is the best result ever achieved by the service improving on previous results which have been at 98% for some years. The results were helped by the increased response rate and reflect many years of work by the service in its commitment to customer care.
- 4.2.6 The service wide results also show significant shifts in the amount of respondents rating the twelve categories as very good and similarly a reduction in the number rating the service as poor. The rating for very poor has always been very low just 1% rating copy services at this level. In six of the categories the service has over 60% of respondents rating it as very good.
- 4.2.7 The results for individual offices similarly show an upward trend. However at the Staffordshire Record Office one of the areas where performance has decreased is the microfilm and fiche viewing facilities, this is partly because the newer machines do not perform as well as the older models. Unfortunately this older model is no longer available. Areas which have improved at Stafford include the visitor facilities rating (up 6%) which was due to the introduction of a new drinks machine in January 2010. Onsite computer facilities also went up by 7% as a result of the upgrade of public computers in August 2010. Another significant improvement was in the rating of copy services which had increased by 11% and which can be attributed to a review

of staffing in this area to broaden their roles so that this service no longer relied on one member of staff.

- 4.2.8 Lichfield Record Office had downward trends in the physical access and visitor facilities categories (7% and 4% respectively). These are partly due to work which was being carried out in Lichfield Library at the time that the survey was taking place. This has now finished and access has improved. Like Stafford, Lichfield also had its public computers upgraded in 2010 hence the improvement of 23% in the rating for this category.
- 4.2.9 All of the categories for Stoke on Trent City Archives showed an upward trend. Some of the comments on the surveys inevitably referred to the consultation on the reduction of opening hours at Stoke and expressed regret and concern at the proposal. However this did not detract from overwhelmingly positive response about the service.
- 4.2.10 The numerous comments of the surveys reflected the appreciation of the help and advice from the staff: *Very impressed by the extremely helpful and knowledgeable staff; one of the best archives (and I have used many); thank you to the staff for the help to a very stressed learner; I am founder of the Cannock Chase Mining Historical Society, and all the authors of the books about Cannock Chase Coalfield have used the facilities on numerous occasions and still do. Without the records stored here we could not have produced the booksmore books to come.* The comments speak for themselves and show how the Archive Service is valued and also show how research carried out in the reading rooms can have quite far reaching outcomes.

5. CONCLUSIONS FROM BOTH SETS OF RESULTS

- 5.1 The results of both the National Archives Assessment and Visitors to British Archives both demonstrate that the Archive Service has made significant progress and represents an excellent, high performing, valued service. It has retained its position as one of the top ten archive services in the country and the highest performing within the West Midlands.
- 5.2 Along side this the Service has managed to increase its impressive 98% customer satisfaction rating to 100%. In addition the shift from good to very good has taken place in six categories representing a very positive trend in the data.
- 5.3 Despite these impressive results there is always room for improvement as standards and expectations inevitably rise. The pressure to improve the conditions for storage of archives remains and the Archive Service faces increasing competition from other services which have obtained new buildings. Accommodation for the Service is key to improving not only storage but also providing a modern service which reflects the current and future needs of its users.
- 5.4 The demands for access to services online continue to grow and the Archive Service is now actively pursuing opportunities to digitise key family history

resources by investigating commercial partnerships. This will clearly be a great opportunity to widen access to Staffordshire's rich archival heritage beyond the city and county. However the service also needs to focus on its work to reach local communities and help strengthen their identity through its outreach work.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 It is anticipated that any improvements which have already been identified should be able to be accommodated within the existing Archive Service budget, although it may be necessary to call on some general reserve funding.

7. PERSONNEL AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Work to improve and maintain the Joint Archive Service status under the National Archives Assessment will involve further work on accessibility to services and audience development. This work will also support public service development and maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction.

8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The National Archives, on behalf of the Lord Chancellor, has a duty under section 4.1 of the Public Records Act 1958 to inspect and approve the standards of provision by places of deposit for public records outside the National Archives, and also a more general duty under the Royal Warrant of the Historical Manuscripts Commission to promote and assist the proper preservation and storage of records and to assist those wishing to use them for study or research. The National Archives discharges these duties in relation to archive repositories in part by collecting and assessing information from repositories about their governance, storage facilities, documentation and access and preservation arrangements.

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Background documents: Joint Archive Service, Results of The National Archives Self Assessment of Local Authority Archive Services, 2008 and 2010. PSQG Surveys of Visitors to British Archives Results 2009 and 2011.