Staffordshire Archives and Heritage Service

Digital Engagement Strategy - January 2023

Introduction

1.1 Staffordshire Archives and Heritage comprises Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service, the William Salt Library and the County Museum Service. The Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service is an Accredited Archive Service administered and funded by Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council under a joint agreement. The William Salt Library is a charitable library managed by the Archive Service on behalf of the Trustees. The County Museum is a provisionally Accredited Museum funded by Staffordshire County Council and works in partnership with museums across the region to provide museum development support.

1.2 The Archive Service operates Staffordshire Record Office, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives and the William Salt Library. A significant proportion of the County Museum Service's collection is on long term loan and public display at the National Trust owned Shugborough Estate. The Archive Service provides services for Staffordshire County Council in relation to its legal documents and archives.

The vision is:
Connecting people to the collected stories and heritage of Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent and beyond.

The 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.

Aim of the Strategy

2.1   Whilst delivering major projects a priority for the joint service is seeking news ways of engaging with wider and more diverse audiences. This will allow the service to promote the collections in our care; connect residents to their history, reach new audiences and to raise awareness of new offers. Our visitors, service users and stakeholder's relationship with information, communication and technology is well established and we need to respond to this.

This strategy, in conjunction with the digital engagement plan and supporting documents, aims to provide a cohesive approach to digital engagement for Staffordshire Archives and Heritage. This approach will support the services' wider aims, parent authority direction and current project targets. It builds upon a solid foundation of high-quality previous work that established digital activity and seeks to grow and evolve our

digital engagement, in a way where we consistently seek to improve our offer and follow best practice.

The strategy recognises the following key points:

a) That the service works jointly but also needs flexibility to meet the needs of two geographically separate bases
b) That the digital world is growing and evolving at a rapid pace
c) That digital engagement is a vital tool towards improving inclusion & accessibility
d) That digital engagement is a resource heavy and specialist form of engagement
e) That we need to acknowledge and mitigate against digital poverty, low digital confidence and other barriers to online participation

This strategy draws on a previous strategy from 2019, recognised best practice from the archives and museum sector, audience research and parent authority guidance.

Background

3.1   According to Avocado Social, 45 million people used social media in the UK in 2021, equating to 67% of the population. This figure has remained steady throughout and following the Covid-19 pandemic, although it is acknowledged that the pandemic created an overwhelming demand for online and digital content. Around 98 percent of all social media usage is on mobile devices and the average user worldwide has six different accounts across several platforms. The fastest growing platform is Tik Tok. The UK Social Media Statistics for 2021 - Avocado Social

Archives and Heritage Current Digital Services

4.1   Currently Staffordshire Archives and Heritage provides (digital) information about the service and its holdings via a variety of different websites and social media platforms and this can be confusing to visitors or users:

4.1.1 County Council Web pages hosted on the main SCC website.
Provides basic information. Unsuitable for engagement or marketing, can be difficult to navigate, doesn't showcase our services or offer.

4.1.2 Staffordshire Past Track
Popular image-based site that holds over 40,000 resources, redesigned in 2015. Has good levels of visitor feedback & engagement. Potential for increased e-commerce.

4.1.3 Online Catalogue – Gateway to the Past
Reliability issues and not user friendly. To be integrated into new website.

4.1.4 Staffordshire Name Indexes

This website gives access to a range of name indexes drawn from the archive collections and used primarily by family historians. Some of which provide completely free information, while others bring in a limited amount of income through copies. New indexes are being added on a regular basis.

4.1.5 FindMyPast
Findmypast is one of the leading commercial online family history providers. The site offers access to images and indexes and is marketed and promoted worldwide. Key Staffordshire family history sources have been digitised and made available through FindMyPast, including parish registers, wills and inventories, and marriage records. It generates significant income for the Service.

4.1.6 Other websites
There are a number of smaller subject focussed websites which are legacies of externally funded projects. These include Staffordshire Views, the Sutherland Collection, the Minton Collection, Children on the Move, Staffordshire Carriages and Meaningful Momentos.

4.1.7 Social Media & Blogs
We manage two Facebook pages, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube accounts, several different themed blog sites plus one current microsite. We currently have 3000 followers on both Facebook & twitter, and just over 1000 on Instagram. The Staffordshire Past Track Facebook page has over 10,000 followers

4.1.8 E-newsletters
We currently share a general service update as an e-newsletter which the public can sign up to via the Staffordshire County Council website. We also send out specialist newsletters to the History Network & our volunteers. These have a combined readership of between 4000 and 7000 people.

Data from 2021/22 shows that we have existing good levels of audience engagement digitally, including:

70,579 website visits per year
22,939 online catalogue visits per year
252,938 Staffordshire Past Track visits per year
89,171 FindMyPast visits per year
12,832 Staffordshire Name Index visits per year

Opportunities

5.1 Used creatively and responsibly, digital activity and social media applications can be a valuable tool for engaging audiences.

By exploiting different social media tools and the content they already provide, services can address the following areas of development: Marketing & profile building, Engaging and consulting, Enhancing the learning experience, Celebrating/recording and sharing.

Social media has become strongly associated with marketing and can support us to raise awareness of our visitor offers going forward.

Priorities

6.1   Our priority areas of work are set out in the digital engagement plan document. The key developments are to procure a new externally hosted website, implement a social media content calendar and embed hybrid offers in our public programme.

6.2   Best practice guidance has been developed to ensure we are keeping up to date with latest developments, using the right tone of voice, creating a balanced content profile, meeting accessibility standards and conversing with the public appropriately. Service guidance will be used alongside parent authority guidance and our work will contribute to parent authority digital engagement and transformation aims.

6.3   We will follow digital safety guidance as set out by National Lottery Heritage Fund whilst also following online safety guidance issue by parent authorities (please see supporting documents). These will be referenced in our service service Safeguarding policy & procedures due to be updated summer 2023.

6.4   A cohesive approach to branding will ensure that our accounts and platforms are easily recognisable, professional and attractive to visitors and users. Branding of digital assets will be reviewed and updated in Spring 2023 and supporting guidance will be shared.

6.5   It is essential that we value digital tools for the additional accessibility that they bring and as such use them in a way that is inclusive.

Measuring performance

7.1   It is key that we monitor and respond to changing engagement trends. Digital engagement data is recorded on a rolling monthly basis as part of the reporting requirements of the Staffordshire History Centre project and collated in the annual report.

Social media performance will be reviewed quarterly and changes made in respond to noticeable trends. We will continue to monitor broader trends and audience research to support this. Blogs and microsites will be reviewed annually and archived when no longer required.

Outcomes

8.1   By implementing this strategy we will be able to ensure that our digital content is of a high quality, that we meet the needs of our service users, grow our audiences and reach target audiences. We will remain relevant is a increasingly digital world.

Our services cannot and should not exclude audiences engaging with our collections in new ways, whilst recognising that there are areas where digital is not a suitable replacement for physical access or in person engagement. Our digital engagement will be a key tool in meeting our targets and goals over the next three years.

Review

9.1   This strategy will be reviewed every three years.

Supporting documents:

Digital Engagement Plan
Social Media Best Practice Guidance
Digital safeguarding guidance – National Lottery Heritage Fund
Staffordshire History Centre Activity plan