

Local Members Interest
N/A

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Joint Archive Committee – Tuesday 27 February 2024

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service and Staffordshire Archives and Heritage Service: Service Website Procurement

Recommendation(s)

- a. That the committee notes the progress and complexity of the procurement process for design of a new service website.

Report of Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills (Staffordshire County Council) and Director of Strategy and Resources (Stoke-on-Trent City Council)

Reasons for Recommendations:

1. Following a complex process, with input required from multiple teams, there has been significant progress and the tender is due to be made live to potential bidders in February 2024.
2. Reflection has highlighted key learning about how to approach complex procurement, including those with a digital output, which will be beneficial in the future.

Background

3. Provision is made as part of the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) funding for Staffordshire History Centre project to tender for a company to design and launch a new website for the service. This forms part of the agreed plan of activities that accompany the funding.
4. The NLHF procurement guidance meant that the website development must go out to tender and could not be completed internally by the Staffordshire County Council (SCC) digital team. The brief also requires a specialist supplier that can integrate the collections catalogue into the website.
5. The new website will replace existing pages hosted on the Staffordshire County Council website whilst incorporating the online catalogue which

is currently hosted by SCC as Gateway to the Past. The website will acknowledge the funding partners for the Joint Archive Service and Heritage Service.

6. The development of a new external website will improve access for residents and service users and allow the service to better promote and highlight our offer and communicate with audiences. There will be the opportunity to streamline processes, and harness digital operations through increased functionality and specialist features not available via the existing SCC webpages.
7. The new website will contribute to a revitalised and vastly improved digital offer in the following ways:
 - a. A stable, integrated catalogue with advanced search options which will be a great improvement to the visitor experience for researchers.
 - b. Signposting to multiple digital resources in one place will be more user friendly and researchers will be able to conveniently browse the breadth of our resources.
 - c. Clear visitor information and promotion of events will allow residents to easily access services and plan their visit to our sites.
8. The need for a new external website was based on extensive user consultation during the development phase of the History Centre project. Further information can be found in the briefs and activity plan documents.
9. Staff turnover in the Archives and Heritage Service, lack of specialist ICT resources in the procurement team and a delay to progressing some aspects of the activity plan whilst seeking a grant uplift, contributed to delays to the procurement process for the website. In addition, the development of specialist documentation proved to be complex and required feedback, input, and review from multiple teams with specialist knowledge.
10. Bespoke terms and conditions were required, and the documentation has been re-drafted several times following legal review.
11. To mitigate delays around communication with audiences both parts of the service created project microsites. Positive feedback about the microsite has been received from staff, audiences, and sector leads.
12. Reflecting on this procurement, lessons have been learnt and will be fed into the project evaluation. These include:

- a. Regular meetings have been established to create channels of communication; one with the ICT project manager for the SHC and on all aspects of digital engagement with key service staff.
 - b. One staff member has coordinated all the feedback from multiple teams and acted as a single point of contact with the legal team.
 - c. Support has been given by managers in the procurement team. In future any delays will be escalated to them as early as possible.
13. The proposed web address for the new service website has been discussed and researched by the Archives and Heritage Management Team (which the City Archives Manager attends) with input from ICT colleagues. The proposed address of www.staffsstokehistory.gov.uk has been approved by the Chair and Vice Chair of the Joint Archives Committee. This has been selected as the most appropriate address for the following reasons:
 - a. It is inclusive of all areas of the joint service and has an obvious link to the service's role.
 - b. For continuity it is the same name as one of the existing social media channels used by the service.
 - c. The use of the gov.uk domain suffix gives greater control over the ownership of the site address long term and increases visitor trust.
 - d. Agreeing a web address in advance of the procurement documents being made live has been recommended as best practice by the solicitor reviewing the terms and conditions for this procurement.
14. Documentation is currently under final review from the legal team with input from procurement ICT specialist staff. The tender will be made live as soon as possible and shared with multiple specialist suppliers to encourage bids. A phased project plan has been developed to allow the successful bidder to launch the first part of the site as early as possible.
15. Other archive services are being consulted on their experience of procuring similar specialist website services by learning from their experiences we can be as efficient as possible during the start-up process with the successful bidder.

Legal Implications

The tender documentation has been reviewed by SCC legal staff and bespoke terms and conditions have been created.

Equalities implications

This report has been prepared in accordance with the personnel and equal opportunities' policies of the County Council and the City Council. The tender process requires bidders to agree to accessibility guidelines as specified by NLHF.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

Funding is in place from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Using both NLHF guidance and Staffordshire County Council procurement processes ensures good value for money.

Risk implications

Risk register for the service has been completed.

Climate Change Implications

Sustainability issues will be interrogated as part of the procurement evaluation using the tender quality questions.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Briefs for Staffordshire History Centre procurement
Staffordshire History Centre Activity Plan

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