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| Local Members Interest |
| N/A |

Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Joint Archive Committee 22 November 2012

Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service Update on Digitisation of key family history collections

Recommendation(s)

1. That this report updating the Committee about the proposal to digitise key family history sources is received. The first report was brought to the committee in February 2012 and approved.

Joint report of the Director for Place and Deputy Chief Executive (Staffordshire County Council) and the Director of Adult and Neighbourhood Services (Stoke-on-Trent City Council)

2. Reasons for Recommendations

- World wide access to the Archive Service's most heavily used collections
- Generation of income to help support the care of these archives
- Meeting user demand for online access
- Enables the Service to devote more time to developing work with communities to raise awareness of archives that relate to their place and raise pride in their local heritage
- Ensures Staffordshire is not left behind as other archive services deliver access online in this way (London Metropolitan Archives, Dorset History Centre, Liverpool, Manchester, Warwickshire and Cheshire are amongst services which have already launched their content online).
- Meeting objectives of the government policy on Archives

Background

3. The scope of the project will cover digitisation of the most heavily used and name rich sources for family history. These will include:
 - Parish registers for the historic county of Staffordshire including Stoke on Trent and the Black Country. The cut off date for the project will be 1900 to avoid issues with Data Protection and protect privacy.
 - Marriage bonds and allegations for the Diocese of Lichfield which are held by Lichfield Record Office. These records are the papers which survive when a couple apply for a marriage licence to enable them to marry more quickly or with more status. These records date from 1617 to 1900.
 - Wills and inventories for the Diocese of Lichfield held at Lichfield Record Office. Alongside the parish registers these records are also a key source for family history recording information about families and the descendants of the testator. The wills date from 1521 until 1858 when the process of proving a will passed from the ecclesiastical courts to the civil courts and so this will be the cut off date.

- Probate Court Act Books 1532-1638 for the Diocese of Lichfield held at Lichfield Record Office. These records complement the wills and inventories.

4. Since June 2012 the Archive Service has continued to work on its proposal to digitise key family history resources. This work has been assisted by the County Council Procurement and Legal teams to develop an Invitation to Tender and Proposal Contract.

5. There has been a delay due to the Legal process required between the County Council and the Diocese. The Diocese will provide a letter to support the project to digitise the parish registers. This is following on from consultation with the parishes through the Archdeacons' visitation process in April 2011. No objections were raised by the parishes and this means the project will proceed on the basis of the consultation.

6. It is intended that the proposal will be posted on the County Council's website in November and commercial providers will be invited to bid against it. It is then hoped to appoint the successful bidder in December with a view to the contract starting as soon as possible. The length of the contract will be ten years with a break at seven years. There will be an option to add in other material to the digitisation project.

7. Estimates of likely income are difficult to provide as other similar archive services are bound by commercial confidentiality. However since June it is now anticipated that this will generate an additional £25-30,000 income for the service. It should also be noted that the launch of content online will also affect existing income generated through the provision of photocopies and research which is factored into these predictions.

8. The income generated will help provide sustainability for the Archive Service during the continuing difficult economic climate. The committee will be kept informed of progress of the project as it continues.

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Appendix 1

Equalities implications:

The digitisation of key sources accessible through a commercial website will offer alternative channels of access but not replace the free onsite Archive Service. The proposal stipulates free online access to be available at Archive Service sites.

Legal implications:

The proposal has been developed with the Legal Services team who have ensured that the Joint Archive Service contract with an external supplier is robust and offers the Service value for money.

Resource and Value for money implications:

The proposal places the most emphasis on achieving the best royalty deal for the Archive Service and will require guaranteed royalties for a limited period. The Head of Procurement has also been consulted to ensure that the Archive Service achieves value for money with the project. The project will require Archive Service staff time to manage it and ensure that the end product is of high quality.

Risk implications:

The cost and risks of digitisation, development of front end delivery will be on the commercial partner's side. The Archive Service will ensure that the contract enhances the reputation of the Service and its parent authorities through close involvement in the management and delivery of the project. The risks of individual parishes objecting to the project has been minimised through consultation with them through the Archdeacons and working with the Diocese.

Climate Change implications:

Direct delivery of online access to key sources will help to minimise some travel around the county.

Health Impact Assessment screening:

No significant implications.

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List of Background Papers

| Papers | Contact/Directorate/ext number |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Proposal to Digitise Staffordshire & Stoke on Trent Archive Sources Local Customer Survey Nov 2011 Taking Part Survey 2011 | Joanna Terry/Place/ x8370 |