

**Minutes of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Joint Archives Committee
meeting held on 12 November 2020**

Present: Mike Davies (Invitee/Observer), Gill Burnett, Lorraine Beardmore and
Victoria Wilson

PART ONE

1. Appointment of Chairman and Vice-Chairman

RESOLVED – (a) That Councillor L. Beardmore be appointed Chairman for the ensuing year until the next Annual Meeting in June 2021.

(b) That Councillor Mrs. V. Wilson be appointed Vice-Chairman for the ensuing year until the next Annual Meeting in June 2021.

2. Declarations of Interest in accordance with Standing Order 16

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2020

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2020 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

4. Predicted Outturn 2020/21

The Committee considered a joint report of the Director of Corporate Services and City Director of Housing and Community Services setting out the predicted outturn for 2020/21 (Schedule 1 to the signed minutes).

Members noted that a spend of £788,133 was predicted against an approved budget of £613,830 which, if realised, would result in a net overspend of £174,303 comprising core services (£72,279) and Staffordshire County Council Sites and Public Services (£102,024). Whilst this overspend also included a net transfer of £37,200 from reserves, it would be met by the County Council, if necessary.

With regard to the General Reserve, the current forecast was a balance of £69,160 at year end. This assumed a transfer of £37,200 net underspend from Stoke-on-Trent City Council (referred to above) and payment of £251,000 towards match funding for the Staffordshire History Centre Project.

They also noted a balance of 57,547 expected in the Archive Acquisition reserve.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received and noted.

(b) That £251,000 match funding for the Staffordshire History Centre Project be committed from the General Reserve.

5. Review of Fees and Charges

The Committee considered a joint report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Families and Communities (Staffordshire County Council) and the Director of Housing and Community Services (Stoke-on-Trent City Council) regarding a review of the Joint Archive Service's fees and charges for 2021/22 (Schedule 2 to the signed minutes).

Members noted that the Archive Service's fees and charges were reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that they reflected changes in demand and costs of providing the various services available in terms of staff time, equipment and travelling. In addition, account was taken of the prevailing economic climate and the availability of the on-line service offer.

For 2021/22 it was proposed that fees charges for the Research Offer should remain unchanged. However, it was proposed to simplify the structure of fees and charges for the supply of copies, in order to better reflect the time spent by staff in providing the service. The current price differential between copies ordered in the Reading Room at Staffordshire Record Office and those ordered on-line was to remain in place. However, this was for the first copy only, with remaining copies being charged at the same rate as those ordered in the Reading Room. In addition, it was proposed to remove the price differential between black and white and colour copies by introducing a single charge of £1.50 to reflect that the majority of orders were now fulfilled on-line and to make estimates easier to provide.

No change was proposed to fees and charges for talks and visits, owing to demand having dropped significantly during the Covid-19 Pandemic and in recognition of the current low rate in the Retail Price Index.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received and noted.

(b) That the revised schedule of fees and charges set out in Appendix 2 to the report be approved for introduction by the Joint Archive Service from 1 April 2021.

6. Staffordshire History Centre Project - Update

The Committee considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Families and Communities (Staffordshire County Council) and Director of Housing and Community Services (Stoke-on-Trent City Council) updating them on progress with regard to the Staffordshire History Centre (SHC) Project (Schedule 3 to the signed minutes).

Considerable progress had been made in the Audience Research strand of the project including completion of an online survey in May and June 2020 in order to:- (i) understand motivations for visiting; (ii) identify key market drivers and barriers to visiting and; (iii) understand more about users and other cultural venues they visited, which received a total of 440 responses from all age groups. Whilst most respondents were found to be from Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent, 69% were female and approximately half had visited the service previously.

The Staffordshire Record Office was found to be the most frequently visited site with family and local history being the key motivation. Most people had discovered the service through publication of the regular newsletter (which had included a link to the survey) or Facebook page. High social media usage was found amongst visitors with the main reasons being given as, “to keep up to date with talks and events” and “to see behind the scenes images of documents and objects”. Whilst 46% of respondents planned to visit the service in the future, the main barriers were found to include lack of free time or awareness of the service offer. Little reference was made by respondents to accessing exhibitions or events.

In addition, two online focus groups had been recruited with the aim of gaining a better understanding of motivations for heritage attendance, expectations and preferences/perceptions and to test the proposals for Staffordshire History Centre. The two groups expressed interest in exhibitions and events relating to the Staffordshire Hoard and pottery industries and also suggested other themes for the future initiatives. Views about the Staffordshire History Centre, William Salt Library and talks and tours were very positive and there was high demand for expansion of the digital offer.

The results of the above audience research work were being used by the contractor to develop a Marketing Strategy for the Staffordshire History Centre.

Research undertaken in connection with the Learning strand had also been completed. A survey of local teachers had elicited 31 responses with the following common themes about the offer emerging:- (i) needs to enhance, enrich and be relevant to, the school curriculum; (ii) requires pupils to put their learning into context; (iii) essential to be child-friendly and appealing to pupils and teachers alike; (iv) must be inclusive and accessible to all; (v) needs to offer hands-on engagement for pupils; (vi) must be something that the school cannot (or is unable to) provide easily; (vii) venue and activities should encourage ‘awe and wonder’ in pupils and; (viii) Offers value for money. Teachers were also asked for their opinion about the single most important item the Staffordshire History Centre should offer and the responses received included:- (i) interaction with real objects and archive material; (ii) must be fun, interactive and hands-on; (iii) help to explain change over time; (iv) bring history to life; (iv) encourage pride in Local history; (v) offer something that can’t be done in school; (vi) provide new experiences and; (vii) offer a range of activities.

The consultant had also contacted various potential partner organisations (public and private sector) for delivery of learning activities. Although responses had been positive, further progress had been prevented by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, seven ‘virtual’ learning sessions had been written using images from Staffordshire Archives and Heritage collections including:- (i) Mystery Staffordshire Objects; (ii) Staffordshire Timeline; (iii) Staffordshire Portraits; (iv) Victorian Stafford Gaol; (v) Discover Your Local Area; (vi) Design Your Own Manuscript and (vii) Create Your Own Coat of Arms, all of which had been made available to teachers during the March-July 2020 national lockdown.

With regard to the Design and Implementation strand, consultants had been recommissioned to update the design report and Implementation Plan, there had been new work on increasing biodiversity within the garden at the site and an ecology report on the current habitat and also been requested.

Progress had also been made on updating the Business Plan using information gained from the Audience and Learning research activity. The Evaluation Plan would be renewed once the Activity Plan was almost complete.

Work had resumed on repackaging and cataloguing the William Salt Library collection prior to its relocation, with support from the Collections Assistant.

Funding approval had been sought from the County Council to extend the storage capacity of the History Centre from two floors to four floors. This would enable the service to operate from one site and provide storage space for an estimated 55 years. Although Planning Permission had yet to be obtained, Stafford Borough Council were supportive of the proposals.

Following this decision, the County Council's capital contribution had increased to £1.894m, which meant that the grant percentage for the project has reduced from 75% to 63%. The design proposals were to be updated and presented to the NHLF at the mid-stage review on 10 December 2020.

During the discussion which ensued, Members welcomed news of the progress which had been made in spite of the pandemic and paid tribute to the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for their work in promoting this exciting project for the benefit of residents of Staffordshire.

RESOLVED – That the report be received and noted.

7. Date of next meeting - 25 February 2021 at 10.30 am, Venue to be Confirmed

RESOLVED – (a) That the date and time of the next meeting be noted.

(b) That Members be notified of the venue for the next meeting once further details are known.

8. Exclusion of the public

RESOLVED – That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business which involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of schedule 12A (as amended) of the local Government Act 1972 indicated below”.

PART TWO

9. Archives and Heritage Service Restructure - Update

(exemption paragraphs 2 and 3)

The Committee received an exempt joint report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities (Staffordshire County Council) and Director of Housing and Community Services (Stoke-on-Trent City Council) regarding the

restructure of the Archives and Heritage Service and noted the progress which had been made.

10. Relocation of Stoke-on-Trent City Archives - Update

(exemption paragraphs 2 and 3)

The Committee received an exempt oral joint report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities (Staffordshire County Council) and Director of Housing and Community Services (Stoke-on-Trent City Council) updating them on the progress made with regard to the relocation of Stoke-on-Trent City Archives.

Chairman