

Report of the Head of Libraries & Heritage

## **Update report on the City Archives & Local History Service**

### **Summary**

1. In December 2008 the Executive received a feasibility study report recommending changes to the management of the City Archives to enable delivery of the city's vision for the Archives (see Annex A.) This report describes the progress to date in implementing those changes and describes the planned next steps for realising the vision.

### **Background**

2. The December 2008 report identified that the city archive had significant development potential but lacked the leadership, management or financial capacity to allow it to unlock that potential. The report made several recommendations to address these issues which can be summarised as:
  - Retain the City Archive in-house, within the Library service, and merge the Archive and Local Studies into a single service.
  - Provide leadership and the management capacity to realise the service's potential by creating a Development Manager to lead the merged service and to raise development funding.
  - Re-focus the Archive on its original remit to preserve and maintaining the unique York Civic Archive.
  - Create a Development Trust based on the Hampshire Archives Trust model to act as a focus for fundraising and engagement with stakeholders.
  - Initiate a project to re-locate the Archive and Local History to the Central Library as part of existing plans to develop the Library building.
3. In accepting the study report, the Executive authorised a one-off start-up capital grant of £30k to support the Development Trust, and the provision of £32k to cover additional staffing costs for the service in 2009/10. Both these items were to be treated as one-off start-up costs for financial year 2009/10 only, and continued funding of the additional staffing costs from 2010/11 onwards were to be realised through efficiency savings.

## Part 1: Progress Report

### 4. New structure and efficiency savings

The full merger of the former Archives and Local Studies services was formally implemented on 1st April 2010 as part of the wider Library Service staffing review. The new post of Archives and Local History (ALH) Development Manager had been filled by external recruitment in July 2009, and from this date the existing separate Archives and Local Studies Library teams both reported to this new post in preparation for merger.

5. Complete merger of the two services required a new structure which would realise the efficiency savings needed to fund the service from 2010/11 onwards, but would also support the archives vision by:

- retaining a critical mass of professional specialist skills
- providing enough staff to operate ALH public services for at least 45 hours per week.

6. These objectives have been achieved by bringing forward the relocation of ALH public services to York Explore to take place as part of the Phase 1 development that opened in May 2010. This has allowed ALH public services to be delivered as an integrated part of the York Explore service.

7. A single team of Reading & Learning Advisors and Explore Leaders delivers the core public services in all parts of the building, including ALH, seven days a week. This makes available a pool of 19fte public services staff to ALH, as compared to the pool of 2.5fte public services staff available to the pre-merger Archives and Local Studies teams.

8. The York Explore public services staff are supported and trained by an enlarged team of specialist ALH professional staff. The number of qualified professional posts have been increased from the previous 3fte to 4.5fte

Archives & Local History Development Manager - 0.6fte

Archivist (Civic Records) - 1fte

Archivist (Reader Support) - 1fte

Local & Family History Librarian - 1fte

Local & Family History Advisor – 0.9fte

9. The Archivist (Civic Records) is the operational manager for the service, reporting to the ALH Development Manager. This latter post concentrates primarily on fundraising and development work and has been reduced from 1fte to 0.6fte. The resources freed by this change have been used to create an additional 1fte Reading & Learning Assistant at York Explore.

10. The new structure provides a professional specialist member of the ALH team to be available to customers whenever York Explore is open, including at weekends – a total of 66 hours a week. However, there is no spare capacity in the structure to provide 100% specialist staff cover for holidays.

11. There have been teething problems with specialist staff coverage as the key positions of Archivist (Civic Records) and Local & Family History Librarian were

vacant when the new structure was introduced. This has meant operating ALH public services with only 55% of the required staff.

12. The existing team members (Joy Cann, Allison Freeman and Sonia Murray-Kydd) have worked extremely hard to minimise the impact of this staff shortage on customers, but there have inevitably been periods when no specialist staff have been available to help customers. Having to carry two vacancies for an extended period has meant that the ALH training programme for York Explore staff has been rolled out more slowly than planned, which in turn has had an effect on the quality of customer service, and has slowed progress in other development areas.
13. High-quality candidates have now been recruited to both vacant posts: Joel Kerry joined as Local & Family History Librarian from Leeds Library Service at the beginning of August, and Victoria Hoyle will be joining as Archivist (Civic Records) from the University of York in late September.
14. **ALH services at York Explore**  
Public access to the ALH collections is now delivered at a single “one-stop shop” on the first floor of York Explore. This has given the service approximately double the public space of the previous Archives & Local Studies services, although the main room (the former reference library) also does double duty as the quiet study area for York Explore, and as an internet access point for the People’s Network.
15. This part of York Explore was not included in the Phase 1 refurbishment works, and so the layout of this space for its new uses is a compromise, constrained by the need to re-use existing furniture and equipment, and by the limited number of power and data sockets in the rooms and their poor distribution. As a result there is a lack of adaptable spaces for users with special needs (e.g. adjustable chairs and tables for users with mobility difficulties.)
16. The new space continues to lack suitable environmental controls, as did the former Archives and Local Studies Library accommodation. In both hot and cold weather the environment is not conducive to the long-term preservation of archives and rare books or to providing comfortable study conditions for customers. These limitations will be addressed by the Phase 2 development of York Explore, although an attempt has been made to define zones which suit different types of ALH users and to allow more of the collections to be made available in different ways e.g.:
  - a research area with bookable table spaces;
  - a microfilm zone with open access to microfilmed newspapers and archives, and microfilm readers bookable in advance for users;
  - a drop-in local history library with the most frequently accessed stock on open access shelves together with open access to printed archival material (electoral registers and council minutes) for the first time;
  - access to internet resources via a bank of People’s Network PCs
17. This layout is experimental. It may have to be tweaked as experience is gained in what resources are in most demand by customers, and which activities conflict with each other (e.g. bleed through of noise from the PC and microfilm areas into quiet

study areas.) How the space works in practice will provide useful information for the funding bid for the Phase 2 development (see Part 2).

18. Pending recruitment to the vacant ALH posts, the priority for the team to date has been to ensure the greatest possible degree of access to the core local history library collections, together with the newspaper, maps and microfilmed archives. These collections are being moved from basement stores and the former Archives office to open shelves in the ALH rooms, or to an easily accessible stack room on the first floor from where they can quickly be produced.
19. Limitations of staff time have meant that hands-on public access to the original archive collections has been regrettably restricted during this period. These collections have remained in store in the former Archives office in Exhibition Square, with only some access being possible by prior appointment. As a result, hands-on use of the archive collections was only 89 users between the end of May to the end August 2010, as compared to 565 users in the same period in 2009.
20. However, staff have continued to answer detailed public enquires from the archives even if direct access has not been possible with the result that 370 detailed enquiries have been answered in the period May-August 2010, as compared to 349 in the same period in 2009. In the same period there have been 329 booked users for archive and local history resources on microfilm, some of which are likely to be substitutes for access to the original documents.
21. Overall footfall into the ALH room at York Explore was around 15,864 between June and August. This is approximately one third of the total number of users entering York Explore. As this figure also includes People's Network PC users and customers using the room for quiet personal study it is difficult to draw any reliable ALH usage statistics from this figure.
22. It is clear that moving towards a one-stop public access point for ALH in the city centre will require the development of more sophisticated performance indicators for the service rather than simple footfall counts.
23. Use of microfilm and digital surrogates will increase as a way of making more of the collections available to more users. This may lead to a decline in the need to produce original documents for every enquiry, and this type of usage needs to be captured and counted with more precision.
24. The public's use of archives and local history collections increasingly has a "long tail". There may be relatively few hands-on users in numerical terms, but many of those researchers use their studies to publish articles and books, create websites and blogs, deliver talks and lectures, put on exhibitions and displays, and create TV and radio broadcasts. Performance indicators need to be developed which can capture the impact of these uses of York's ALH collections and the benefits to the city that can result.

## Part 2: Next Steps To Realising The Vision



25. With the completion of recruitment to the new ALH team, the service is now in a position to move forward from the initial compromise service of the past four months.
26. The next three immediate areas for progress are:
  - improving our management of the collections and making more of the archive available to customers;
  - setting up the Archives Development Trust.
  - Planning and fundraising for the Phase 2 development of York Explore;
27. **Improving the management of the collections**  
It has become clear that there is a lack of basic collections management procedures for the ALH collections, and that those that do exist are cumbersome and labour-intensive.
28. Cataloguing standards in the archive collections vary hugely from document-by-document transcriptions to summary box lists. Much knowledge about what is in the collections is held in the heads of long-serving staff and is not recorded in any

information system. The audit trail by which the service demonstrates the legal and evidential value of the unique documents it holds is scattered across a variety of hard copy and electronic systems.

29. These issues matter because without knowing what records are held and what evidence they contain the service cannot answer its users questions, cannot show the relevance of the archives to new groups of users, and cannot discharge its function as the long-term corporate memory of the council.
30. Currently a relatively small part of the archive collections (primarily mediaeval and early modern material) is heavily used, whereas the records of the city from the eighteenth century to the present day and the stories that they can tell are relatively underused.
31. To begin to address these issues the ALH service will install the CALM archive management and cataloguing software which is already in use in the majority of local authority archives services, and will start to transfer the existing catalogues and management information into the new system. Use of CALM will also allow publication of the archives catalogues and indexes online.
32. Additionally, a more formal approach will be adopted to taking in new accessions to the collections, and to disposing of material that is no longer required. The ALH collections are now very comprehensive, and the costs of taking new items in (e.g. storage, staff time to catalogue and index, conservation and preservation) must be balanced against what value any new collections will add to the public service.
33. This deliberative process must be transparent and documented, as is best practice in the wider heritage sector, and this will be achieved by publishing collections management decisions on the Council website, including a revised Collections Management Plan.
34. Work will also start before the end of the year in relocating the most used archives collections from Exhibition Square to secure accommodation at York Explore, so that more users can get access to original documents. However, there is currently not enough secure storage space at York Explore to relocate all of the archives collections, and so some material will have to remain accessible by prior notice only. Decisions on what material is managed in what way will be taken in consultation with ALH service users and will also be publicised on the Council website.
35. Completion of recruitment to the ALH team has also created the capacity to re-start a volunteer support programme for the collections. This programme will be developed as part of a wider volunteer programme for York Explore and the whole library service.
36. **The Archives Development Trust**  
The Council has made a one-off start-up grant of £30k in order to establish a Development Trust for the ALH collections. The Development Trust will act as a focus for generating external funding for the conservation of the ALH collections and increasing public access to them, and as a vehicle for engaging more partners and stakeholders.

37. The Council has set up a partnership with the York Civic Trust under a Memorandum of Understanding. Under this the Civic Trust will use its knowledge and expertise to assist the Council to establish the Development Trust. It is intended that the Trust will be operational by March 2011.
38. **“York – Gateway To History” - York Explore Phase 2**  
Planning is already in hand for the Phase 2 refurbishment works at York Explore without which, further development of the ALH service will not be possible. Under the strapline “York – Gateway To History”, the objective of Phase 2 is to create a high-profile easy-to-access city centre archive which will showcase York’s internationally-important ALH collections to both citizens and visitors, and which give hands-on access to the city’s history to at least 22,000 personal visitors from across the city and across the world.
39. “York – Gateway To History” at York Explore will contribute to the development of the city centre visitor offer. It will complement the adjacent refurbished Yorkshire Museum by giving detailed access to the history of the city and people of York. It will enable the further development of the Cultural Quarter by vacating the wing of the Art Gallery currently occupied by the Archives, and will pave the way for follow-on projects to create additional city-centre attractions using the archives to celebrate York’s sense of civic identity.
40. It will also act as a central hub to make the ALH collections available to residents across the city through the branch library network and through partnerships with heritage organisations such as the Civic Trust, the York Oral History Society, the City of York & District Family History Society and through York’s many local history societies.
41. The works required to enable these objectives is planned to include:
- Creation of a new climate-controlled archive repository at York Explore which will meet best practice for the preservation of the ALH collections and which will allow them to be made available at little or no notice within the building. The plan is for the new repository to be created by building the “missing wing” of York Explore on the St Leonard’s elevation.
  - Clearance of the first floor landing to create an uncluttered circulation and display space
  - Refurbishment of the existing ALH rooms in York Explore to create discrete spaces which are configured to meet the needs of different types of users, but which allow a seamless flow of users between different spaces according to how customers wish to use the collections.
42. Detailed space planning for the user spaces will be informed by public consultations as part of the fundraising process. Initial plans include:
- creating a separate quiet research area by inserting a glass partition in the archway to the former Local Studies room;
  - bringing the first floor stack room into public use for microfilm and PC use;
  - increasing the number of bookcases and study tables in the main drop-in area;

- fitting discreet environmental controls to all spaces to improve conditions for both users and the collections.
43. Total project costs at this stage are estimated at between £1.3m and £1.5m. Work has already started on an external funding application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for this project. An indicative capital bid has been made through the CRAM process for £0.5m as matching funding for an application to the HLF for around £1m.
  44. An HLF application of this size will have to be submitted through a two-stage process. The Stage 1 application will be submitted in early 2011. This will include an application for a development grant from the HLF to cover the costs of working up the project in detail. If the Stage 1 application is successful then the detailed Stage 2 application will be submitted in late 2011 or early 2012, aiming for a final decision in mid 2012.
  45. The HLF will not entertain applications for projects on which work has already started, and so work could not commence on this project unless a positive final decision is received in 2012. And, the process is a competitive one - obtaining a Stage 1 pass is not a guarantee that the project will obtain final approval at Stage 2.
  46. HLF grants are awarded on the basis of a 25-year contract. The maximum chances of success will be achieved if the application can demonstrate that the Council has this long-term commitment to maintaining and developing public access to the ALH collections. The application will also have to demonstrate that it is good value for money for the HLF. This is both in terms of the percentage of matched funding that the Council is able to contribute to the project costs and also in terms of demonstrating that the project will be truly transformative. The project will have to demonstrate that it will allow many more people, and many more different types of people, to have access to, involvement with and to learn about their heritage.

## Recommendations

47. Members are asked to note the progress made to date as set out in Part 1; and to endorse the proposed future development plans for the Archives & Local History Service as set out in Part 2.

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### Wards Affected:

**All**

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

**Annex A – Vision for the Archives Service**