

JOINT ARCHIVES COMMITTEE REPORT

Archives Service Proposal

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PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To present Members with a proposal for the Archives Service.

BACKGROUND

2. The current Archives accommodation comprises two core elements:
 - storage for the Archive;
 - public access facilities for people to access the Archives.
3. Teesside Archives has been in its present location since the early 1980's

CURRENT POSITION

4. The current accommodation is barely adequate and poor quality. It meets storage requirements (just) though maintaining required standards is a constant challenge in a building of this age and which has received so little investment. Lift access to parts of the building is also less than satisfactory.
5. The public access facilities are also barely adequate and of very inferior quality – they provide a very poor 'gateway' to the Archive and inadequately reflect the importance of the Archive as a resource for the area.
6. Significant investment is required to resolve these problems; however this is likely to be a long way off given the current funding climate.
7. Even with investment, provision of new accommodation for the Archive will always present a conundrum:
 - the Archive itself is bulky and space consuming, essentially what is required is storage space (albeit high specification storage space). It is not cost

effective to provide storage space in premium town centre (and therefore expensive) space;

- the public access to the Archive however absolutely needs to be provided from a highly accessible location, which adequately reflects the prestige of the collection, and therefore almost by definition should be in premium/high value/town centre space (which will always be high cost).

8. Currently the storage space and the public access space are co-located, and there are definite advantages to this in terms of speed of access by the public to the collection. However a different approach is to decouple the two spaces/functions so that each can be provided in a cost effective and fit for purpose way. There are inevitably cons to this approach, less immediate reduced access for the public to the collection, but these can be managed and mitigated without fundamentally undermining the effectiveness of the service.
9. These issues would need to be tackled to enable any significant investment such as a new Archive Local Study Centre to be developed, but as above the timescale for delivering this has receded. However, without significant investment the current facilities will be increasingly unfit for purpose, and it is difficult to justify making even short-to-medium scale investment into a seriously inadequate building where cost will inevitably be very high and the return on investment poor.

PROPOSAL

10. Middlesbrough Council currently holds within its Central Library a significant reference library. This was the main reference library for the former County Council area, and has been retained and operated largely as it was at the time of handover from Cleveland County. However the reality is that the use of libraries as a source of reference information is falling as people's use of electronic information continues to grow and the role of and demand for the reference library is diminishing significantly. The physical scale and scope of the reference library could therefore be significantly reduced in line with this reduced level of demand.
11. This creates spare capacity/space, and it is proposed that the reading room for the Teesside Archive should relocate to Middlesbrough Reference Library. This would have the following benefits:
 - it would provide much higher quality space for the public to access the Archive;
 - it would reduce the need to make significant investment in public access facilities at the current Archive premises;
 - it creates the potential for savings for the Archives budget without a significant contraction of service (see below).
12. This move would separate the public access space from the Archive storage space (as discussed above) but this can be managed/mitigated as follows:
 - A planned access policy to Archives service/material (i.e. requesting/booking in advance – common practice elsewhere);

- A secure method for packaging and transporting material between sites (needs to be programmed within existing staff resource, plus additional courier cost – approx £50 per week est);
- Secure holding area for original material in the Central Library (space has been identified);
- Some public space would be retained at the Archives to facilitate flexible access to larger amounts of Archive material (booked in advance);
- On-line access from the library (digitisation programme to move material on-line);
- Most popular/used Archive material to be held in the library for immediate access.

13. Archives service costs could be reduced in the following ways:

- removing the reading room may reduce some heat, light and power costs at the current Archive location, though this is likely to be fairly minimal;
- A review of the archives staffing structure, with a possible reduction in staff required. This process could take up to eight months to complete;
- Any savings would be offset by some additional costs associated with the move such as courier costs, etc;

14. A total saving of £25k per year is anticipated, approximately 10% of the current Archives cost and would be reflected in each Authority's contribution. It may not be possible to deliver this whole saving in 2011/12 due to the time it may take to review the staffing structure, but efforts will be made to deliver an equivalent saving in 2011/12.

15. This saving can only be made because Middlesbrough Council is effectively willing to 'share' its current reference library with the Archive service. Similarly, Middlesbrough Council will effectively now pick up the costs of heat, light and power for the new Archive reading room, and again the Council is willing to do this.

16. It is recognised that other partner authorities may have concerns about Middlesbrough 'taking over' the Archive, and if this is the case then we will not pursue this proposal over those concerns. However, the pressing need to improve the service, give it a more sustainable location without the need for significant capital investment, and reduce service costs will hopefully mitigate other Authorities' concern in this regard. Similar savings could only be made within the current premises through a reduction in Archives opening hours.

17. The Archive is potentially to be included in discussion about the development of Tees Valley wide Museums Trust and any Trust may wish to take the Archive in a different direction in the future. This is acknowledged and if this was the case then the Archive reading room could simply move out of the Reference Library in line with whatever plan was developed by the Trust (though this would obviously be with a reduced level of funding/staffing which may affect its ability to operate as a stand alone facility).

18. There would inevitably be some costs involved in this relocation. These have not been scoped until some agreement in principle can be reached, however they are not expected to be extensive.
19. The problem of the inadequacy of the Archive's current location for housing the Archive remains. Options are to be explored here and further report will be made in due course.

OPTION APPRAISAL/RISK ASSESSMENT

20. Not applicable

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

21. Outline financial implications are as set out earlier in the report, with details still to be determined.

RECOMMENDATIONS

22. That members agree the proposal presented.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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