

JOINT ARCHIVES COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Joint Archives Committee was held on 27 January 2011.

QUORUM/SUBSTITUTION

In the absence of a quorum and given the business to be transacted, it was agreed by those present to proceed with the items on the agenda on an informal basis. Any decisions would be formally considered at the next meeting of the Joint Archives Committee.

Owing to that fact that this was now the second meeting in succession that had been inquorate, it was emphasised that all partner authorities must, due to the nature of the Committee, appoint a named Substitute/Executive Member to the Committee. A short discussion ensued in relation to this. Potential remedial suggestions concerning this issue were made; however these would require further investigation as they could have potential implications for the Committee's Terms of Reference. Those Members present would raise the issue of Substitution with their respective Authorities.

PRESENT:

Councillor S Clarke (Redcar and Cleveland Council), Councillor C Rooney (Middlesbrough Council) and Councillor Mrs M Womphrey (Stockton Council).

**OFFICERS:

J Brittain, S Cartlidge, L Featherstone, R Hobbins, G Jarritt, R Kench and C Lunn.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

J Nicholson (Friends of Teesside Archives Group).

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor H Thompson (Hartlepool Council).

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Name of Member	Type of interest	Item / Nature of Interest
J Nicholson (Friends of Teesside Archives Group)	Personal/Non Prejudicial	Agenda item 7 – Archives Proposal – Representative of the Friends of Teesside Archives Group.

**MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Joint Archives Committee held on 22 July 2010 were submitted.

The minutes of the meeting of the Joint Archives Committee held on 28 October 2010 were submitted.

It was agreed by those present that, in the absence of a quorum, the minutes of the meetings of the Joint Archives Committee held on 22 July 2010 and 28 October 2010 would be formally ratified at the next meeting of the Committee.

SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO.10 – ORDER OF BUSINESS

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule No. 10, the Committee agreed to vary the order of business to deal with the items in the following order: Agenda Item 7, Agenda Item 4, Agenda Item 5, Agenda Item 6, Agenda Item 8.

ARCHIVES PROPOSAL

The Head of Economic Development, Culture Communities, presented a report, the purpose of which was to present Members of the Committee with a proposal for the Teesside Archives Service, and to obtain feedback in relation to the proposal made. It was explained that the comments received would form the basis of further staff consultation, followed by formulation of a final report/proposal for the Committee's approval.

The current Archives accommodation comprised two core elements: storage for the Archives, and public access facilities for people to access the Archives. Teesside Archives had been in its present location since the early 1980s. It was felt that the current accommodation was barely adequate and poor quality. It met storage requirements, though maintaining required standards was a constant challenge in a building of its age and which had received so little investment. Lift access to parts of the building was also less than satisfactory. The public access facilities were also barely adequate and of very inferior quality – it was felt that they provided a very poor 'gateway' to the Archives and inadequately reflected the importance of the Archives as a resource for the area. Significant investment was required to resolve these problems; however this was likely to be a long way off given the current funding climate. Even with investment, provision of new accommodation for the Archives would always present a conundrum: the Archive itself was bulky and space consuming, essentially what was required was storage space, albeit high specification storage space. It was not cost effective to provide storage space in premium/expensive town centre space; the public access to the Archives however absolutely needed to be provided from a highly accessible location, which adequately reflected the prestige of the collection, and therefore almost by definition should be in premium/high value/town centre space, which would always be high cost.

It was explained that currently the storage space and the public access space were co-located, and there were definite advantages to this in terms of speed of access by the public to the collection. However a different approach was to decouple the two spaces/functions so that each could be provided in a cost effective and fit for purpose way. There were inevitably problems to this approach, including less immediate reduced access for the public to the collection, but these could be managed and mitigated without fundamentally undermining the effectiveness of the service. 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 had receded. However, without significant investment the current facilities would be increasingly unfit for purpose, and it was difficult to justify making even short-to-medium scale investment into a seriously inadequate building where cost would inevitably be very high and the return on investment poor.

It was explained to the Committee that Middlesbrough Council currently held within its Central Library a significant reference library. This was the main reference library for the former County Council area, and had been retained and operated largely as it was at the time of handover from Cleveland County. However the reality was that the use of libraries as a source of reference information was falling as people's use of electronic information continued to grow and the role of and demand for the reference library was diminishing significantly. The physical scale and scope of the reference library could therefore be significantly reduced in line with this reduced level of demand. This would create spare capacity/space, and it was proposed that the reading room at Teesside Archives 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 Archives;
- It would reduce the need to make significant investment in public access facilities at the current Archives premises;
- It would create the potential for savings for the Archives budget without a significant contraction of service.

This move would separate the public access space from the Archives storage space, but this could 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 (this would need to be programmed within existing staff resource, plus additional courier cost – estimated at £50 per week);
- Secure holding area for original material in the Central Library (space had been identified);
- Some public space would be retained at the Archives to facilitate flexible access to larger amounts of Archives material (booked in advance);
- On-line access from the library (digitisation programme to move material on-line);
- Most popular/used Archives material to be held in the library for immediate access.

Archives service costs could be reduced in the following ways:

- Removing the reading room might have reduced some heat, light and power costs at the current Archives location, though this was 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.

A total saving of £25k per year was anticipated, which was approximately 10% of the current Archives cost and would be reflected in each Authority's contribution. It might not be possible to deliver this whole saving in 2011/12 due to the time it might take to review the staffing structure, but efforts would be made to deliver an equivalent saving in 2011/12. This saving could only be made because Middlesbrough Council was effectively willing to 'share' its current Reference Library with the Archives service. Similarly, Middlesbrough Council would pick up the costs of heat, light and power for the new Archives reading room, and again the Council was willing to do this. It was recognised that other partner authorities might have concerns about Middlesbrough 'taking over' the Archives, and if this were the case then the proposal would not be pursued 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 would 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.

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

There would inevitably be some costs involved in this relocation. These had not been scoped until some agreement in principle could be reached; however they were not expected to be extensive.

The problem of the inadequacy of the Archives' current location for housing the Archives remained. Options would be explored here and a further report would be provided in due course.

During the discussion that followed, it was highlighted that part re-location to the Reference Library could be a positive move if re-deployment could be achieved.

Regarding the current configuration of the Middlesbrough Reference Library, it was confirmed that lift access was available via the rear entrance to the building. Regarding toilet facilities, it had been acknowledged that current arrangements, i.e. staff-use only, would need to be revised if the move was to take place. In terms of structural changes to the library, the Head of Library Services indicated that as a Grade 2 listed building, consent for any changes would need to be approved.

Concerns were expressed that re-location to the Reference Library could have negative implications for Teesside Archives. It was felt that after three years of continued effort and hard work, the completed British Steel project would not receive the attention deserved. In addition, the current accommodation in Exchange Square offered a useful research room; convenient disabled parking; lockers and catering facilities. In terms of expenditure, the Friends of Teesside Archives Group had donated a significant amount of money to the facility over the years, with thousands of pounds being spent preserving artefacts and documents. It was explained that moving such objects would put them at unnecessary risk of damage. It was felt that the overall saving of £25k would not warrant a re-location to the Middlesbrough Reference Library.

The Head of Economic Development, Culture Communities, explained that the purpose of the proposal was not to downgrade or closedown the Archives Service, but to generate savings from it. It was indicated that if the re-location move did not take place, then changes to other areas of the service would need be explored. This was a pro-active review that aimed to ensure continued, if not better, access to Teesside Archives.

Reference was made to the visitor access figures. It was felt that these indicated that the current location of the Archives building was not wholly accessible to all individuals/groups from other areas that wished to visit the Teesside Archives building.

It was suggested that all Reference Libraries held by the four partner Authorities be utilised as a portal to the Archives Service. In addition, regular updates and discussion at quarterly meetings of Reference Library staff should also be undertaken.

The Committee discussed online access to Archives records. The Archives Manager provided details concerning the long-term objective of transferring documents such as Parish registers and local history files, e.g. workhouse records, online. It was mentioned that the National Archives Service currently digitised records on demand, and had recently reduced its opening hours and removed its microfilm facilities.

Reference was made to the Museums Review that was currently being undertaken. It was indicated that the final decisions made could impact upon the Archives Service, which could potentially offer an alternative solution to the current proposal. Details regarding the outcome of the Museums Review were currently awaited.

It was indicated that the aim of the re-location was to offer improved access to the Archives for the public. A short discussion ensued with regards to car parking in the centre of Middlesbrough.

It was acknowledged that further work would need to be undertaken, particularly concerning financial expenditure and savings, before any final decisions regarding this proposal could be made.

RECOMMENDED

That the proposal be developed in further detail and presented to the Committee in due course.

REASON

The decision was supported by the following reason:

For reasons outlined in the report.

PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR OCTOBER 2010 – DECEMBER 2010

The Archives Manager presented a report, the purpose of which was to update Members on the performance of Teesside Archives for the period September 2010 – December 2010.

Teesside Archives had completed the self-assessment survey for the National Archives (TNA) and continued to await the results. There were currently no statutory indicators or standards relating to Archives Services. A C.I.P.F.A return was required on an annual basis. The range of

work undertaken by Teesside Archives was varied and included conservation and outreach work. The submitted report provided a summary of this work.

The number of visitors to Teesside Archives during this period was 1233. A breakdown was shown in Appendix 1 of the report. The visitors who were from outside the area came from other parts of the UK.

Details were provided in respect of Acquisitions; Outreach events; Learning and access and Conservation work that had been carried out.

With regards to visitor access and outreach events, it was suggested that services could be delivered within the partner Authorities' libraries in order to improve figures. An exhibition board had recently been purchased, which would be used at future events. Access students from Middlesbrough College would be visiting the Archives during the week commencing 31 January 2011. A query was raised in relation to the organisation of school outreach events. It was explained that there were currently two employees (in one job-share post) who arranged these. Schools would be contacted and offered the opportunity to either visit Teesside Archives, or have a member of the Outreach Team visit them. It was acknowledged that further work needed to be undertaken in this area. Learning resources pertaining to the Archives had been made available online. It was felt that as more material moved online in the future; physical visitor access figures would drop, potentially becoming more of a specialist nature in the future. Overall, it was felt that the visitor figures remained constant for a service of the Archives' size.

A survey by the Public Services Quality Group would be undertaken in February/March 2011 to determine visitors' opinions of the Archives Service.

With regards to action planning, it was explained that discussions had recently been held. It was felt that improved focus concerning the direction of the Archives Service was needed, as previous plans had been quite vague. Mention was made of the current economic situation and the impacts of budgetary requirements on future planning. The representative from the Friends of Teesside Archives Group indicated that volunteers would be available to provide assistance with future projects.

With reference to the British Steel Archives collection, it was suggested that contact be made with representatives of SSI, the company that had taken over Teesside Cast Products in Redcar, as it was felt that this could take the Archives Service forward. The Committee discussed this and suggested that the Member representative from Redcar and Cleveland Council raise this with representatives from SSI.

RECOMMENDED

- 1. That the Member representative from Redcar and Cleveland Council contact representatives from SSI to discuss/raise awareness of the Teesside Archives service/British Steel collection.**
- 2. That the performance report for October 2010 – December 2010 be noted.**

REASON

The recommendation was supported by the following reason:

For reasons outlined in the report.

BUDGET UPDATE REPORT

The Head of Library Services presented a report, the purpose of which was to update Members on the 2010/2011 revenue budget.

As Members were advised at the meeting of 18 February 2010, the budget which was recommended by the Joint Archives Committee at its meeting on 23 July 2009 had subsequently been referred to and agreed by the Tees Valley Chief Executives. Each authority had been invoiced, and had paid, their proportion of the budget as agreed.

Appendix 2 of the report showed the revenue budget at 1 April 2010 and the expenditure to 31 December 2010. There was a projected underspend on the staffing budget due to staff vacancies within the Archives Service. The figures would be confirmed in the Quarter 4 report.

RECOMMENDED

That the expenditure on the budget to date be noted.

REASON

The recommendation was supported by the following reason:

For reasons outlined in the report.

MUSEUMS REVIEW

Reuben Kench from Stockton Council provided the Committee with information regarding work that was currently being undertaken in relation to a review of museum services.

It was explained to Members that following a recommendation by the Tees Valley Chief Executives' Group, a review into museum services had been commissioned. It was felt that services could potentially operate on a more effective and efficient basis. The work was being co-funded by MLA.

The original brief produced for the work excluded reference to Teesside Archives; however, following debate at the Tees Valley Chief Executives' Group, this was later adapted to include Teesside Archives, as it was felt that any changes made to the way museums operated could impact upon the service.

Following commissioning of the review, businesses had been invited to tender for the work. Mr. Adrian Barridge, a Consultant with vast experience in museum service planning and evaluations had been contracted to the work. The work was broken down into two stages. Stage 1 comprised of option appraisal and selection; the options highlighted included: Status quo; Lead authority responsibility; Shared responsibility; Outsourcing, and any other option that was presented. At the end of stage 1, a report was submitted to the Tees Valley Chief Executives' Group, with the recommendation that the option of a Not-for-profit vehicle across the Tees Valley sub region, with outsourcing of services, be approved. The Tees Valley Chief Executives' Group approved this recommendation. Details concerning the fiscal benefits associated with this approach were outlined to the Committee.

Stage 2 of the process comprised interrogation of the preferred option and outlining of the business case. This referred to areas such as expenditure; potential for linked trading activity, and potential for consolidation with other authorities/organisations. An initial report had been completed and forwarded to the Review Steering Group for debate.

Relating to Stage 2, Mr. Barridge was currently undertaking a supplementary piece of work that would involve meeting with the Archives Manager and the Head of Library Services to establish the key functions of the Archives Service and the objectives of the Friends of Teesside Archives Group. It was expected that this work would be completed during February/March 2011. It was expected that the initial report, which outlined the business case, would be developed in order to incorporate any findings arising from this supplementary work.

The final report would be forwarded to the Review Steering Group and the Tees Valley Chief Executives' Group in due course. It was anticipated that the report would be more widely circulated after the May 2011 Elections, with the preferred approach hopefully being implemented by summer 2012. An update would be provided to the Committee in due course.

A discussion ensued regarding the similarities, differences and potential overlap between the Museum, Archives and Library services.

Concerning the scale of the services offered, the Committee discussed the advantages and disadvantages of having a regional model, as opposed to a Tees Valley sub-regional model. It was felt that although a regional model would work theoretically, it would not be deliverable practically. Members discussed the opportunities that could arise from having a sub-regional coalition model.

RECOMMENDED

That the information, as presented, be noted.