MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL	Middlesbrough moving forward

EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR JOINT ARCHIVES COMMITTEE

Report title	Digital Preservation Proposal	
Executive Member*	Executive Member for Culture and Communities	
Chief Executive or Director	Kevin Parkes, Executive Member for Growth and Place	
Date	5th September 2018	
Purpose of the report	To request additional funding to allow for the provision of a digital preservation system to allow Teesside Archives to care for digital records to recognised standards.	
Summary of the report	That members note that current provision for the storage and management of digital records is insufficient, causing digital records to be at risk of loss. Access to born digital and digitised images is extremely limited.	
If this is a key decision, which key decision test applies?*	Over the financial threshold (£150,000)	
	Amends the Council's policy framework	
	Affects two or more wards	
	Non-key	X
For the purposes of scrutiny call in procedure this report is*	Exempt under s.12a Local Government Act 1972	
	Urgent	
	Non-urgent	X
If this is a confidential report, which category of exemption(s) from the Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972 applies?	N/A	
Decision(s) asked for	That members approve a proposed budget increase of £12,000 per annum from 2019/20 to allow for the provision of an appropriate digital preservation system. With the set-up fees coming out of the existing budget.	
Impact of decision(s)	The budget of Teesside Archives would increase by £12,000 per annum and a digital preservation system would be procured.	
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What is the purpose of this report?

Teesside Archives requires additional funding to allow for the provision of a digital preservation system so the service can care for digital records to recognised standards.

While systems and processes for the management of paper records have been in place for decades, the management of digital records presents an entirely new challenge. Born digital and digitised records are currently stored on a variety of servers and hard drives without any provision for their long-term preservation. The service is not able to adequately provide access to these records and cannot offer safe storage to records created in digital formats by the four Teesside Boroughs such as Council Minutes and reports.

Teesside Archives has limited staffing and resources and requires an increase in funding to allow for the procurement of a dedicated digital preservation solution. This web hosted solution would provide 100% data integrity and file format preservation to ensure the records will remain accessible in the long-term.

Online access to selected digital resources would revolutionise the use of key collections for people living in the four Teesside Boroughs and wider communities reducing the need for people to travel into Middlesbrough to benefit from the service.

The provision of a dedicated digital preservation solution would allow the service to conform to best practice and save time and money by reducing the requirement for on-site digital storage while improving search functions to make the records easier to locate.

Why is this report necessary?

Having secured Provisional Archives Accreditation a required action to allow the service to move to full Accreditation is to continue working with governing and funding bodies to develop a solution for the long-term preservation of born digital material. This action must be achieved by July 2020.

The intention to relocate the service to new premises in the coming years also presents a compelling reason to invest in digital preservation now to allow for increased access to vital collections using digital surrogates while the move is undertaken.

There is an immediate need to safeguard the digital aspect of the collection and protect it against the risk of corruption or loss. Local IT services cannot offer the quantity of storage required and do not have the capacity to carry out the various preservation functions necessary to ensure the long term survival of the digital records.

Born digital records produced by the Teesside Boroughs are at risk of being lost, leading to a catastrophic situation where decades of records fail to survive creating legal risks and a loss of corporate memory. If not properly managed the records are at risk of becoming unreadable due to format obsolescence.

Investment made in creating and collecting born digital and digitised records is wasted if the data is not subsequently stored securely and gets corrupted or lost.

Current IT provision is not sufficient for the long term preservation of archival data with iPortal only suitable for current and semi-current records and not photographs or audio files.

Access to digital records would remain limited with a dependence on the Archivist to arrange access where possible. The service would continue to struggle with awareness of collections and the ability to engage local communities.

The lack of an appropriate system for digital preservation could lead to reputational damage to the service and its funding authorities due to potential loss of collections and poor access provision for customers.

What decision(s) are being asked for?

That members approve a proposed budget increase of £12,000 per annum from 2019/20 to allow for the provision of an appropriate digital preservation system with the potential to develop online access. Initial project set-up fees would come out of the existing budget.

Why is this being recommended?

The provision of a digital preservation system is essential to allow Teesside Archives to carry out its core function to maintain, preserve and make accessible the collective memory of Teesside. Without a system in place unique, irreplaceable records are at risk of being lost and leaving a gap in the heritage of Teesside and the history of the local authorities.

There are benefits for all stakeholders:

Joint Archives Committee: Ensuring the service is fit for purpose and peace of mind that essential resources are secure and preserved for future generations. The opportunity to bring the service up to best practice standards by leading the region in addressing the challenge of digital preservation.

Heads of Service: Increasing the capacity of the service to preserve and manage born digital records allowing key records to be transferred from the Teesside Boroughs. Preventing data loss through corruption, ransomware attack or human error and with improved workflows to save time and money. Increased access facilities to help make key collections available to people in the Boroughs.

Archives Staff: A fit for purpose, easy to use digital archive, fully hosted and managed by an external company, allowing the team to continue to grow digital collections securely and maximise their use.

IT Team: Responsibility for irreplaceable digital archive assets moved to an expert provider, freeing up primary storage and solving the problems faced to provide access to these collections.

Researchers, Public & Local Communities: Increased and immediate access to selected digital collections when needed with a simple search interface and improved online access allowing resources to be shared more widely across the Teesside Boroughs, nationally and worldwide.

Depositors: Increase confidence in the ability of the service to safely and securely store and preserve born digital records for the long term allowing for an increase in the transfer of modern records from the four Teesside Boroughs and other organisations.

Other potential decisions and why these have not been recommended

Manage the data in-house: This invites huge risks for data corruption, data loss and human error. It is costly to keep large volumes of data on primary storage. It has the potential to slow down other IT systems on the network. There would be no archival management system in place if data were kept in-house, nor would there be any file format preservation activities; therefore access, management and preservation of the data would be extremely difficult.

Do nothing: This option, whilst the most common, is of most concern. Due care and attention has been paid to analogue archival collections for centuries and the same level of care needs to be applied to digital assets. Perhaps arguable even more attention needs to be paid to born-digital material due to its transient nature. If nothing is done to securely store and preserve the file formats of any digital collection, it is 100% certain that the file will ultimately be rendered utterly inaccessible, in orders of magnitude shorter timeframe than any analogue media ever created.

Impact(s) of recommended decision(s)

Legal

There are no legal implications

Financial

The budget of Teesside Archives would increase by £12,000 per annum

The Mayor's Vision for Middlesbrough

N/A

Policy Framework

N/A

Wards

N/A

Equality and Diversity

N/A

Risk

Actions to be taken to implement the decision(s)

N/A

Appendices

Appendix

Background papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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