

## **Norfolk Records Committee**

### **Minutes of the Meeting Held on 16 January 2009**

#### **Present: -**

##### **Norfolk County Council**

Mr J Shrimplin

Mr M Taylor

##### **King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council**

Mrs E A Nockolds

##### **Breckland District Council**

Mr P J Duigan (Vice-Chairman)

##### **Norwich City Council**

Mr R Blower

Mr S Jeraj

Ms R Makoff

##### **Broadland District Council**

Mr J W Bracey

##### **Great Yarmouth Borough Council**

Mrs M Coleman

##### **South Norfolk District Council**

Mr C J Kemp

#### **Non-Voting Members**

##### **Co-Opted Members**

Mr M R Begley

Prof C Rawcliffe

Prof R Wilson

##### **Observer**

Dr V Morgan

##### **Representative of the Bishop of Norwich**

Revd Charles Read

##### **Representative of the Norfolk Records Society**

Dr G A Metters

#### **1. Apologies for Absence**

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Mr Lloyd Owen and Mr Jewson.
- 1.2 As Mr Lloyd Owen had given his apologies, Vice-Chairman Mr Duigan took the Chair. Mr Duigan welcomed Prof Rawcliffe and Dr Morgan who were joining the Committee as Co-Opted Member and Observer respectively. He also welcomed Mr Blower as it was his first meeting representing Norwich City Council.

#### **2. Minutes**

- 2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 November 2008 were confirmed by the Committee and signed by the Chairman.
- 2.2 Members asked Kristen Jones (Committee Officer) if there was an update on the issue of the minute style. The Committee Officer explained that this had been discussed at the last meeting of the Overarching and Steering Committee at Norfolk County Council. Members of committees were not to be identified by name unless the meaning of the minute would not be understood otherwise.
- 2.3 Dr John Alban (County Archivist) updated Members on the progress of the Kings Lynn Archive report, which went to the Economic Development and Cultural Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 17 January 2009. He explained that the Panel thought that the proposal of the Working Group to use the town hall was positive. The next step was to conduct a feasibility study.

### **3. Any Other Item of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **4. Members to Declare any Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **5. Norfolk Record Office Financial Monitoring Report**

5.1 The annexed report (6) by the County Archivist was received and presented by John Perrott (Finance and Business Support Manager). The report provided the committee with a progress report on the Norfolk Record Office (NRO) revenue budget and reserves and provisions for 2008/09. The Finance and Business Support Manager explained that a break-even budget was expected with the budget shortfall being met by NRO savings together with a transfer of funds from Cultural Services relating to support savings.

5.2 During the discussion, Members raised the following:

- Members congratulated officers on their ability to meet the needs of the NRO during such challenging economic times.
- The query was raised how the NRO made savings. The Finance and Business Support Manager explained that this was achieved through some unfilled vacancies at the NRO as well as making small savings from other budgets within the service.

#### **Resolved**

5.3 To agree the report.

### **6. Service and Budget Planning, 2009-12**

6.1 The annexed report (6) by the County Archivist was received and presented by the Finance and Business Support Manager. The Finance and Business Support Manager explained that the report updates the Norfolk Records Committee on proposals for service planning for 2009/10 to 2011/12. The report also included updated information on the Provisional Grant Settlement, revenue budget proposals and capital funding bids.

6.2 During the discussion the following points were made by Members:

- Members asked if attempts were being made to reduce energy costs. The Finance and Business Support Manager stated that the Department of Cultural Services was working with consultants generally to find ways of saving on energy costs and a survey of The Archive Centre had just been carried out. The Archive Centre's repository was designed with heavy insulation but the need to maintain the constant atmospheric conditions necessary for archive preservation there requires high energy consumption.
- In response to a question about advertising the services which the Record Office offers, the County Archivist responded by saying that work was

underway to improve the appearance and hopefully the impact of the Record Office's website.

## **Resolved**

- 6.3 To note the report and, specifically, to highlight to Cabinet that the Norfolk Record Office has a special need, due to extraordinary pressures caused by high energy costs impacting on a building which has to deliver constant atmospheric conditions for the preservation of archives. The Committee requested that Cabinet should consider this when outlining their budget for the next financial year.

## **7. Audit of the Statement of Accounts, 2006-07**

- 7.1 The annexed report (7) by the Head of Finance was received and presented by John Perrott (Finance and Business Support Manager). The report provided the details of key issues identified during the audit of the 2006-07 Statement of Accounts by the Audit Commission.
- 7.2 The Finance and Business Support Manager briefly highlighted the two key issues. First, there was no signed formal agreement for the operation of the Norfolk Records Committee. Second, the committee needed to confirm that it agreed to abide by Norfolk County Council's governance arrangements. However, with the impending announcement on the Local Government Review (LGR) it was proposed to wait until a final decision is known before drawing up a formal agreement.
- 7.3 Members pointed out that although there had not been a formal agreement for the operation of the Norfolk Records Committee there were over thirty years of custom and practice.

## **Resolved**

- 7.4 To note the report and comments in the 2006-07 Annual Governance Report and endorse the proposed actions.

## **8. The National Archives' Self-Assessment Programme For Local Authority Archive Services, 2008**

- 8.1 The annexed report (8) was presented by John Alban (County Archivist). The report provided gave information about The Norfolk Record Office's performance in The National Archives' (TNA) self-assessment of local authority archive services in 2008.
- 8.2 The County Archivist made the following points about the report:
- During the national pilot scheme in 2006 of the self-assessment, the NRO came second and in the following year, when the formal programme was in effect, the NRO came first nationally. This past year, the NRO has again performed very well, however the service did not yet know their official ranking.
  - The scoring system was previously 0 to 3 stars. However, the National Archives have now changed this system to 0 to 4 stars to match the scoring system of local authorities for ease of understanding.

- There were five main sections of the questionnaire for which the NRO improved in all but one. At Section 3 (Access and Outreach Services) the NRO decreased from 75.5% in 2007 to 72% in 2008. The County Archivist conveyed his surprise that this figure had dropped and by this percentage, particularly due to their work with prisons and the very successful exhibition on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, for which the NRO received a national award.
- The County Archivist had analysed the scores within Section 3 and shared with the committee that the NRO's service standard for receiving accessions was 30 minutes, however in reality these were received within 10-15 minutes. In the future, the NRO will tighten these service standards to reflect the reality of the high level of service which is actually in practice. The County Archivist said that those that were given the highest rating for this received accessions 'on demand'.
- The same point applied to the NRO's customer service standards, in particular those related to sending responses to letters. The service standards for communications would be tightened to reflect the quicker timescales where were already in practice.
- The County Archivist explained that he and the NRO staff would consider these changes and would challenge TNA with support from the committee. However, he did not feel that it would be appropriate to enter into a formal appeals process.

### 8.3 During the discussion, Members noted the following:

- The query was raised as to whether the NRO advertised the fact that it was a Four Star service on promotional material and stationary. The County Archivist replied by saying that some of the promotional materials indicated the NRO's status however stationary, such as letter-headed paper, did not because it would require wastefully disposing of previous stationary. This had been added to NRO staff's email signatures.
- The point was made that the average scores for Sections 1 to 5 were so low that there must be a few quite poor performing services. The question was raised as to whether funding was awarded to those poor performing services because they needed to improve or if funding was awarded to outstanding services as a reward. The County Archivist explained that those poor performing services tended to be London Boroughs who lacked the critical mass to deliver such a service. He also noted there was very little government funding for The Archive Centre and that the Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) had produced a scheme to assist services attract their own external funding. Nationally there were twenty places available on this scheme making it incredibly competitive. However, the NRO was offered a place on this scheme and it was thought this was partly because the NRO could be a model of best practice for smaller services. The County Archivist added that good assessment results and the NRO's high profile were good ways of opening up doors for external funding.
- The query was raised about the consequences of such a high rating. The County Archivist said there was no real consequences to this and stressed

that having Four Stars was very beneficial for the NRO when it came to recruitment of the best staff. Due to the NRO's association with Norfolk County Council (NCC), this also shown positively on NCC, however unfortunately there were not local authority performance indicators associated with archive services.

- In response to a question, the County Archivist replied that the NRO's achievements have been recognised and he had received several letters on behalf of the service congratulating the NRO staff, including one from the Leader of NCC, Daniel Cox.
- The question was raised whether the King's Lynn Archives brought the NRO's scores down. Susan Maddock (Principal Archivist) explained that during the pilot year, the NRO completed separate returns, but answered 'yes', that this did bring down the scores. The County Archivist added that the next official assessment would take place in 2010 and this was expected to look in some detail at the questions on preservation and conservation, and buildings, security and the environment, which would be particularly relevant to the King's Lynn Archives.

### **Resolved**

- 8.4      1.      To congratulate the NRO staff on achieving Four Stars through TNA assessment and to ask the County Archivist to produce a press release about this achievement.
- 8.5      2.      To support the County Archivist when informally challenging TNA over the results in Section 3 of the Self-Assessment Programme results.

### **9.      Date and Time of Next Meeting**

The next meeting would be held in The Green Room in The Archive Centre on Friday, 1 May 2009 at 10:30 AM.

### **10.      To Answer Formal Questions of Which Due Notice Has Been Given**

There were no other formal questions.

The meeting closed at 11:45 a.m.

**Chairman**



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