

## **Norfolk Records Committee**

### **Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 November 2009**

#### **Present:**

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

Mr D Murphy (Chairman)  
Mr R Rockcliffe  
Dr F Williamson

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

Mr P Duigan

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

Mr J Bracey

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

Mrs M Coleman

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

Mrs E Nockolds

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

Ms J Divers  
Mr S Jeraj  
Ms R Makoff

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

Dr C Kemp

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

##### **Co-Opted Member**

Prof. C Rawcliffe  
Prof. R Wilson

##### **Representative of the Norfolk Record Society**

Dr G A Metters

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

Revd C Read

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

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs V R Gay, Mr M R Begley, Mr R Jewson, and Dr V Morgan.

#### **2. Minutes**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 June 2009 were confirmed by the Committee and signed by the Chairman.

#### **3. Matters of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

#### **4. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **5. Norfolk Record Office – Performance and Budget Monitoring Report**

- 5.1 The annexed report (5) by the County Archivist was received. The report provided Members with an update of progress with the Record Office's Service Plan and Performance, together with an update of the budget position at the end of September 2009. Members were asked to note these two aspects of the report.

5.2 During the discussion the following points were made:

- Regarding the savings made on electricity costs, the exact figure was not yet known. This figure would be at least 25% savings but more specific details would be reported to the committee at its next meeting in January 2010.
- The question was asked whether there were any implications for using the ICT and manuscript reserve budgets for utilities costs. The Finance and Business Support Manager explained that reserves had been increased from support services savings in previous years to cover this eventuality. The reserves which were combined could be redistributed at a later date and there were no negative implications in the long term.
- The Finance and Business Support Manager responded to a question saying that there was no nationally recommended minimum level for service reserves and that the Norfolk Record Office (NRO) had increased these to an adequate level based on energy forecasts.
- The NRO has been publicly applauded at the recent Economic Development and Cultural Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel for its careful use of resources in exceeding exhibition targets and incurring no extra costs in doing so.

5.3 **Resolved**

To note the NRO's revenue and reserves and provisions budget monitoring position for 2009/10.

To note progress with service planning actions.

**6. Service and Budget Planning 2010-13**

6.1 The annexed report (6) by the County Archivist and Head of Finance was received. The report set out the main planning considerations by this committee and the context in which they were set. This included the financial position and the relevant performance and improvement considerations which related to the council's delivery of its corporate objectives. It also set out the overall funding prospects and spending pressures for the service and the draft, potential savings options for balancing the 2010/11 service budget. The report asked Members for their views and comments on these issues.

6.2 During the discussion the following points were made:

- Members requested that, for future reports, officers include within the table of the report, the percentage that the budget saving represented compared to the relevant area of budget being considered. This way Members would be able to see the proportionate impact of these increases and decreases in budget spending.
- It was clarified that, although it was known what the Government grant received by the local authority would be for 2010/11, Norfolk County Council (NCC) did not know what this figure might be for the following three years.

In addition, it was reasonable to assume that, taking into account the spending squeeze within the public sector, there would not only be no further increase in the level of the Government grant, but it may in fact decrease.

- The Finance and Business Support Manager explained that, with regard to energy prices, up until last year the NRO was subject to three-year contracts. However, through ESPO, the NRO now renews its contracts annually. Their contract currently was made up of six months of fixed prices and six months of floating or variable prices.
- Regarding where the largest savings could be made, the County Archivist explained that the two main elements of cost to the NRO were energy costs and staffing costs and there was little latitude to make savings elsewhere. However, when considering reducing these budgets, careful thought was needed to ensure that the quality of services was maintained. The NRO was considering options such as offering staff flexible or early retirement, but it was thought that some redundancies may be inevitable. It was noted legally, employees could request to work past the retirement age. However, the employer could decline this request, giving a good business case.
- Despite the economic downturn, the number of visits to the NRO had increased. The County Archivist agreed that it was particularly painful to reduce the number of exhibitions at a time when visitor numbers were increasing, but it was simply the reality of the economic situation. While some exhibitions of original documents would continue to be held, displays of posters and facsimiles of documents in the place of original documents would occur more often.
- In response to a question on the long term effect on the preservation of documents, the County Archivist said that some savings were having to be made by reducing the amount of packaging currently used for storing documents. However, the long term well-being of documents would be always borne in mind. As an example, he mentioned that, when documents arrived, a decision would be taken as to whether or not they needed to be boxed, with priority being given to those, such as loose papers, which needed the added protection of an enclosure.
- The Chairman welcomed the suggestion to encourage the creation of a supportive group of individuals who frequently used the NRO and understood the value of such a resource. These 'Friends of the Norfolk Record Office' could hopefully assist the NRO in raising external funds to help maintain the level of service. The County Archivist acknowledged this idea by saying it was a positive step and that he would do what he could to do this. However, he added that raising external funds through commercial sponsorship in the UK was not as straightforward and effective as it was in some other countries such as Belgium.
- In response to a question on the current level of staffing at the NRO, the County Archivist stated that there were 34 full time equivalent (FTE) posts which were covered by 38 employees.

To note the report.

## **7. Risk Register**

7.1 The annexed report (7) by the County Archivist was received. This report asked the committee to note the latest version of the Norfolk Record Office's risk register and invited any comments.

7.2 During the discussion the following points were made:

- In response to a question regarding the possible risk presented by climate change, the County Archivist replied that this risk fits into Risk 6 (Loss of building systems and plant including non-delivery of suitable environment conditions).
- It was agreed that Risk 6 did not include the possible risk presented by climate change to those records stored outside the NRO and that this risk should be listed within the Risk Register as well.

## **7.3 Resolved**

- To note the report.
- To add to the Risk Register the potential impact presented by climate change on records stored outside the NRO.

## **8. Periodic Report, 1 April – 30 September 2009**

8.1 The annexed report (8) by the County Archivist was received. This report informed the committee in detail about the activities of the Norfolk Record Office during the period, giving Performance Indicators and listing the accessions received during the period. Members were asked to note the report.

8.2 During the discussion the following points were made:

- Volunteers were a vital resource of the NRO and the question was asked about what was being done and if anything more could be done to adequately recognise their contributions. The County Archivist gave the example of the 14 volunteers, working on the Record Office's joint project with the Parliamentary Archives, who had received training in research techniques and had acted as 'history detectives' to carry out research into five local commissioners named in the Land Tax Act, 1821. This Act, which at 378 metres, was the longest document in the Parliamentary Archives, was the focal point of the Parliamentary Archives' exhibition, *People and Parliament, Connecting with Communities*, held in Westminster Hall in July 2009. Norfolk's section was at the centre of this display. The 'history detectives' were rewarded in September with a special day in London, which included a tour of exclusive areas of the Palace of Westminster and the Parliamentary Archives.
- The County Archivist also noted that the Record Office had its own column in the *Eastern Daily Press (EDP) Sunday* supplement every week, in which some articles had highlighted the contributions of volunteers at the NRO.

- It was suggested that the County Archivist make contact with the Chairman's Office in regard to holding a reception in honour of the volunteers and the hours of hard work which they have contributed to the NRO.

### 8.3 **Resolved**

To note the report.

## 9. **Archive of G. King and Son Ltd Cataloguing Project**

Nick Sellwood (Senior Conservator) and Lucy Purvis (Archivist) gave a presentation on their work in connection with the Archive of G. King and Son Ltd cataloguing project. Members were invited to view the display which they had set up at the end of The Green Room following the close of the meeting.

## 10. **Exclusion of the Public**

10.1 The County Archivist presented the following reasoning for exclusion of the public and conclusion in respect of the public interest test:

10.2 The Norfolk Record Office (NRO) bids at auctions and acquires by private treaty sales documents of relevance to Norfolk, which fit within its Collections Policy. Prices of documents are increasing all the time, particularly because dealers' attitudes are 'to charge what the market can stand'. If prices paid by the NRO for documents were to become generally known publicly, this will have the effect of inflating the market. (Also, persons who might otherwise have donated or deposited documents might feel encouraged to charge for them.) Since public funds are involved in its purchases, the NRO operates a strict value for money policy and strives to pay no more than was necessary, while, at the same time, trying to ensure that no important documents are lost to Norfolk. Releasing information about prices paid for documents would have a significant detrimental impact on Norfolk County Council's commercial revenue and might put documents out of the NRO's financial reach, thereby losing part of the county's written heritage. It was therefore not in the public interest to release information about prices paid for document purchases.

### 10.3 **Resolved**

To exclude the public from the following item.

## 11. **Periodic Report: Appendix – Manuscripts Purchased, 1 April – 30 September 2009**

11.1 The annexed report (11) by the County Archivist was received. This report gave details of the documents purchased by the Norfolk Record Office during the period. Members were asked to note the report.

### 11.2 **Resolved**

To note the report.

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

The next meeting of the Norfolk Records Committee will be held at 10:30 a.m. on Friday, 15 January 2010, in The Green Room, The Archive Centre, Martineau

Lane, Norwich.

The meeting ended at 12:00 noon.

Mr D Murphy, Chairman



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