

Norfolk Records Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on 3 February 2023 at 10.30 am at County Hall Norwich

Present:

Norfolk County Council

Cllr Michael Chenery of Horsbrugh (Chair)

Cllr A Birmingham

Cllr P Duigan

Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk

Cllr E Nockolds

Norwich City Council

Cllr B Price

North Norfolk District Council

Cllr V Gay

Broadland District Council

Cllr G Nurden

Breckland District Council

Cllr R Kybird (Vice-Chair)

Non-Voting Members

Representative of the Bishop of Norwich

Rev'd C Read

Representative of the Norfolk Record Society

Dr G A Metters

1 To receive apologies and details of any substitute members attending

- 1.1** Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton, Cllr Duffin, Cllr V Thomas, Cllr V Thomas, Lady Dannatt, Cllr M Jeal, Dr V Morgan, Prof. C Rawcliffe and Mr A Steynor.

2 Minutes

- 2.1** The minutes of the meeting held on 28 October 2023 were confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.

3 Declarations of Interest

- 3.1** The Chair declared an "other interest" as a trustee of NORAH (Norfolk Archives and Heritage Development Foundation).

4 Finance and Risk

- 4.1** The Committee received a report that covered the Norwich Record Office revenue budget for 2023/24, capital programme and reserves and provisions and provided an update on the service risk register.

- 4.2** The following points were discussed and noted:

- The Record Office was currently forecast to achieve a balanced budget position.
- The Record Office had been asked to provide savings of £27,000 in the coming financial year which could be achieved from staff savings (through

management of staff vacancies during the current financial year) and a reduction in searchroom opening hours.

- The County Archivist reported regularly to the Records Committee and the Director of Culture and Heritage on the risks that were included in the Risk Register.
- The Risk Register contained six key risks which were subject to only minor change since the previous report to the Committee in October 2022.
- Some of the amber risks were very long-term; aimed at ensuring documents survived and remained accessible for hundreds of years.
- In reply to questions, it was pointed out that utility costs were centralised and, as such, did not appear on the NRO risk register.
- Reserves and provisions were as set out in paragraph 1.3 of the report.
- Data in the Record Office catalogue could be found on google searches and related to more than one million records. Advice on how to make best use of the catalogue could be found on You Tube, and through the training provided by the education outreach team.
- In reply to questions, the County Archivist said that Record Office staff were providing advice and assistance about a local community archive following a fire in the village hall at Little Walsingham.
- One of the six long term strategic aims of the NRO was to support Norfolk's archive ecology. There were known to be more than 100 community archives in the county. A tool kit to assist local community organisations with all aspects of its work could be found on the NRO website.
- It was pointed out that NORAH (Norfolk Archives and Heritage Development Foundation) gave small grants to community-based organisations.

4.3 The Committee **CONSIDERED and **COMMENTED** on:**

1. Forecast position of the revenue budget, reserves, and provisions.

2. Management of risk for 2022/23.

5 Public Access to the Norfolk Record Office

5.1 The Committee received a report that contained information on on-site and remote use of the Norfolk Record Office along with the results of the public consultation on reducing NRO opening hours, a report on which was presented to the previous meeting of the Committee.

5.2 The following points were discussed and noted:

- The County Archivist explained how Norfolk County Council had conducted an annual budget consultation for financial year 2023-24 which contained the proposal to reduce opening hours at the Norfolk Record Office. The full results of this consultation were included as an appendix to the report.
- At the October 2022 meeting, the Committee had asked for details on the level of public use of the Norfolk Record Office. This information was set out at paragraph 3 of the report and was fully explained to Members.
- The Committee's attention was drawn to the number of NRO volunteers which related to the capacity of NRO staff to supervise this work.
- In reply to questions, it was pointed out that there was no single legal instrument which set out public rights of access to documents held by the Record Office; the most significant pieces of legislation were the Public Records Act and the Freedom of Information Act.

- The Record Office received approximately £30,000 a year from digital licencing; there remained few additional opportunities for substantially increasing this source of income.
- Members discussed the close working relationship that the Norfolk Record Office had with the Library Service and how the two services complemented each other.
- Members spoke about the high level of respect that Record Office users had for NRO staff and the reputational damage that could be caused by a reduction in NRO opening hours.
- Members also expressed concerns about how the continuing constraints on local government finances threatened attempts to make the Norfolk Record Office's unique and important collections and services accessible to the public.

5.2 The Committee CONSIDERED and COMMENTED on the contents of the report and then, on being put the vote, RESOLVED unanimously:

- 1. That the normal ethos of the County Council was to protect front line services. The NRO had very little scope for budget savings other than through staff reductions and restricted opening hours.**
- 2. The Committee request a “reset” to the baseline budget for this statutory service, in order to maintain an effective service.**
- 3. To reluctantly agree to the reduction in opening hours.**

6 Norfolk Record Office Collection Care Policy

6.1 The Committee received a report that considered the contents of the Collection Care Policy and sought approve for its adoption by the Norfolk Record Office.

6.2 The following points were discussed and noted:

- Minimising the risk of immediate loss, reducing risk to documents when they were in use, conserving damaged documents and storing documents in conditions suitable for their preservation were issues that the NRO took very seriously.
- The Committee was informed that there were many different types of Record Office documents, although most of the collection was on paper and on parchment.
- Parchment made up some 17% of the collection. The conditions required for its storage were stricter than those for paper and formed the basic standard by which all documents were kept.
- The Committee discussed pest control and the security measures that were in place for when people visited the Record Office.
- The Committee also heard about the continuing attempts to encourage more church records to be deposited at the Record Office where they would be stored in conditions more suitable for their preservation.

6.3 The Committee CONSIDERED and COMMENTED on the contents of the Collection Care Policy and APPROVED its adoption by the Norfolk Record Office.

7 Future Meetings

7.1 The dates of future meetings were noted:

14 April 2023	10.30 am
28 July 2023	10.30 am
27 October 2023	10.30 am
2 February 2024	10.30 am
19 April 2024	10.30 am

The meeting concluded at 12.10 pm

Cllr Michael Chenery of Horsbrugh, Chair of the Committee



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