

# NORFOLK RECORDS COMMITTEE

Item No.....

<b>Report title:</b>	<b>Organizational Development</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>13 January 2017</b>
<b>Responsible Chief Officer:</b>	<b>Tom McCabe - Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services</b>
<b>Strategic impact</b> Enhancing access to the NRO's Collection will promote the positive benefits of using archives in terms of education and community engagement. The work described in this report also supports a major strand of service development aimed at involving local communities in the collection and care of their own heritage.	

## Executive summary

Since 2014, substantial progress has been made towards the NRO's five long-term strategic priorities detailed in its Service Plan. Work is ongoing across all five of these areas but two in particular require further development: Alternative Methods of Service Delivery and Fundraising.

This report outlines the progress made towards these long-term priorities and then focuses on the two areas requiring further development.

### Recommendations:

**That committee approves this area of work and the use of funds as detailed in the report.**

## 1. Proposal

That the organizational development work described in this report forms a prioritized area of work in the forthcoming NRO Service Plan and that £85K of reserves be used to support it and future grant applications.

## 2. Evidence

### 2.1 Background

- 1.1 The Norfolk Record Office Service plan outlines five long-term strategic priorities for the service.
  - i. Accommodation
  - ii. Audience Development and Engagement
  - iii. Income Generation and Fundraising
  - iv. Digital Preservation
  - v. Alternative Methods of Service Delivery
- 1.2 Over the past two years actions have been taken to help meet these long terms

priorities. These include:

- i. The creation, year on year, of 30m<sup>3</sup> space in the strongrooms with the aim of extending the ability of the service to collect archives until at least 2023. Service plans from 2020 onwards will need to consider the storage needs of the service beyond 2023.
- ii. A number of projects aimed at bringing new users into the archive including volunteer programmes, partnerships with mental health charities and educational programmes.
- iii. A sizable increase in income generation and the establishment of a new fundraising charity
- iv. A regional pilot developing digital preservation solutions in partnerships with other archive services
- v. The hosting of hundreds of thousands of images on commercial web sites and the creation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Air Division Digital Archive.

1.3 This paper looks at the fifth of the strategic priorities, Alternative Methods of Service Delivery, and in particular those areas relating to:

- i. Archive discovery
- ii. Work with community archives and local history groups

1.4 It also looks at ways of supporting this work, and other areas of archive development, through the continued development of fundraising capacity.

### **3. Archive Discovery**

3.1 In the last eighteen months, the Norfolk Record Office has entered into contracts with family history web sites to mount hundreds of thousands of images. These contracts include provision for indexing the records thereby enabling users to search at transaction level (i.e. a name can be entered and all the records that contain it, or its variants. located). As well as generating income, these contracts have made the records accessible all over the world. However, these images represent only a tiny fraction of the NRO's collection (in the region of 1%) and, whilst plans are in place to continue licencing images, it will never cover anything but a small proportion of the Collection.

3.2 With a few exceptions, the remainder of the Collection is accessed through the NRO's online catalogue, NROCAT. This is used both by remote users and by those in the searchroom. The creation of this catalogue has been a major task over the last decade and represents a huge amount of data (over 812,000 catalogue entries) ready to be discovered. This has been a hugely important work stream providing the top down information required to find out what the NRO holds and enabling the service to better manage its Collection. However,

- i. The existing system has limited search functionality
- ii. It does not come close to releasing the full research potential of the collection

#### Search Functionality

3.3 The current online catalogue is based on CALM software. This became the most widely adopted archive description and management system in the late 1990s / early 2000s and, at the time, was a significant step forward. However, since then user expectations

have significantly advanced and the system's limitations have become increasingly apparent. Therefore, the NRO needs to consider modernising its user interface through migration to a new system or systems.

- 3.4 The NRO also needs to consider new ways in which its metadata may be used in the future. This needs to embrace the description of digital archives, interoperability of data and developments in the semantic web.

#### Releasing Research Potential

- 3.5 In many ways, the tool that sits on top of the Record Office's metadata is of secondary importance. Software systems will change over time but, although rekeying has been required, much of the descriptive metadata in NROCAT was generated decades ago.
- 3.6 Provenance based, structured, hierarchical cataloguing is the basis of archive description. This is long established practice and is enshrined in ISAD(G) (the General International Standard on Archive Description) to which the NRO currently adheres. There is always a need to catalogue collections to make them accessible and decisions on what is catalogued and to what level of description (e.g. collection level, series level, item level) have to be based on resource availability and importance / anticipated demand. For example, the current work on the Great Hospital has been prioritised because of the importance of the collection (recognized by its inscription in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register) and because external grant money has been secured to resource the work.
- 3.7 Once a collection has been catalogued, it can be linked to a series of authority files. These authority files act as an alternative means of access to free text searching or staff mediation. Authority files cover places, names (corporate, personal and family) and subjects. Using a predefined structure means that authority files can also help in the reuse of the metadata in new ways. Currently, authority file indexing is carried out on a very limited basis, usually only at the upper levels of description and without an adequate thesaurus or taxonomy.
- 3.8 Of course, the most important factor to be taken into account is the needs of the user and, in many ways, archive catalogues fail to provide the level of information they require. Whilst ISAD(G) description is essential the resultant catalogues only represent a collection and its series or components. However, many users want to access information at the transaction level and if this ease of access can be achieved the potential for use increases massively. For example
- i. In 2015 over 29,000 document productions were made from the NRO stongrooms.
  - ii. In the four months from July to October 2016, on one family history website, transcriptions and images of NRO documents were viewed 1.2 million times.

Whilst these two statistics do not directly correspond, they do indicate the vast potential for use of archives after metadata is enriched.

The NRO does not, and never will, have the resources required to create this rich metadata for all of its Collection and needs to approach this challenge in creative ways including crowd sourcing, volunteer projects and work with community groups. However, as part of this, two important areas of development work are required:

- i. An options appraisal on the archive software used by the service and, should this conclude that a different system is required, development of a business plan for migration.
- ii. Development of authority file resources.

## **4. Working with Community Groups**

- 4.1 Norfolk has an incredibly rich archive heritage and new accessions come into the Record Office on a daily basis. However, this represents a small proportion of the records worthy of permanent preservation that exist in the county. The Norfolk Record Office needs to find ways of working with local communities to help them rescue, preserve, describe and make accessible this rich archival heritage.
- 4.2 The NRO will be holding its second Exploring Your Community Conference in February. This follows an Archives Skills day for community groups in October. These sessions have demonstrated that there is a clear need for skills development, shared tools and professional support in the community; something the Record Office is not in a position to provide.
- 4.3 These cover areas such as
- i. Documentation so that terms of holding and provenance are established
  - ii. Software for archive description and web mounting of catalogues
  - iii. Authority files for places, subjects and names
  - iv. Digitization, description and web mounting of images in a sustainable way
  - v. Preservation, cleaning and packaging of documents
  - vi. Collecting and describing oral histories.
  - vii. Training and support for cataloguing
  - viii. Archive research and interpretation
  - ix. Mining the resources at the NRO
- 4.4 In the longer term, the NRO can offer sustainability to these groups and their donors who may not have the organizational longevity that a county archive offers. In such cases the NRO could be receiving documents which, as well as having their provenance documented and immediate preservation needs dealt with, have been catalogued by people with local knowledge and passion at a level of description that the NRO could not achieve.

## **5. Fundraising**

- 5.1 As previously reported to the Records Committee, the Norfolk Archives and Heritage Development Foundation (NORAH) was established in 2016. Although still in its development phase, it has successfully raised funds for the purchase of documents at the recent Morningthorpe Manor Country House Sale.
- 5.2 The NORAH trustees met in December and decided that the next priority for the charity's development was recruitment of additional trustees; advertisements are due to be placed in January.
- 5.3 There is still considerable work for the NRO in supporting NORAH. A report will be presented to the next Records Committee meeting for consultation on the charity's fundraising strategy for the current year. This is likely to include such actions as setting up a patron's scheme and a number of fundraising events.

## **6. Conclusion**

- 6.1 Much of the work above will only be achievable with external financial support. Therefore certain aspects of the work especially, that with community groups, will need

to be developed into funding applications. To support this it is proposed that reserves are used to continue the role of Partnership and Development Manager for 18 months and to provide match funding for grant applications.

## **7. Financial Implications**

7.1 It is estimated that this will require £85,000 from reserve funding.

## **8. Issues, risks and innovation**

8.1 Officers have considered all the implications of which members should be aware. Apart from those listed in the report above, there are no other implications to take into account.

### **Officer Contact**

If you have any questions about matters contained or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

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