

# Norfolk Records Committee

## Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 November 2010

### Present:

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

Mrs E Nockolds (Vice-Chairman in the Chair)

#### Norfolk County Council

Mr R Rockcliffe  
Dr F Williamson

#### Breckland District Council

Mr P Duigan

#### North Norfolk District Council

Mrs V Gay

#### Great Yarmouth Borough Council

Mrs M Coleman

#### South Norfolk District Council

Dr C J Kemp

### Non-Voting Members

#### Co-Opted Member

Mr M Begley  
Prof. R Wilson

#### Representative of the Bishop of Norwich

Revd C Read

#### Representative of the Norfolk Record Society

Dr G A Metters

#### Custos Rotulorum

Mr R Jewson

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

Apologies for absence were received from: Mr Bracey, Mr D Murphy (Chairman), Dr V Morgan, Mr P Offord, Prof. C Rawcliffe, Mr S Sands and Ms V Thomas.

### **2. Minutes**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 July 2010 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. Audit of the Statement of Accounts 2009-10**

- 5.1 The annexed report (5) by the County Council's Head of Finance was received. The report detailed the outcome of the audit of the 2009-10 Statement of Accounts by the Audit Commission.
- 5.2 A copy of the Audit Commission report was circulated and is attached to these

minutes at Appendix A.

5.3 During the discussion the following points were made:

- The County Archivist explained that the principal reason for considering the Audit Commission's report was to bring it into the public domain. No key issues had arisen.
- Three non-trivial adjustments had been made to the accounts, which were explained at paragraph 2 of the Committee's report.

5.4 Dr Kemp highlighted that he had not been invited, as a member of the Sub-Committee, to consider the reports circulated on the 22 October. However, that did not affect the decision of the Sub-Committee.

5.5 **Resolved**

To note the report.

## **6. Norfolk Record Office – Performance and Budget Report, April-September 2010**

6.1 The annexed report (6) by the County Archivist was received, which provided details of performance against service plans and budget out-turns information for 2010/11 for the Norfolk Record Office (NRO) for the Committee to consider.

6.2 During the discussion the following points were made:

- Performance against service plans to date was good. The NRO continued to increase visitor numbers and attract new audiences.
- The budget had been reduced by £22,000 during the year, due to shared services budget transfers for ICT and the single postal service. These corporate functions were not part of NRO operations.
- There were no changes to reserves and provisions to report. A sum had been set aside for purchasing collections in 2010/11 and the NRO had been very energetic in seeking external funding.
- The NRO was on target to achieve a break even budget position for 2010/11.
- The Manuscript Reserve was a specific amount set aside to purchase manuscripts. That Reserve had now been amalgamated into the Residual Insurance and Lottery Bids Provision, together with the ICT Reserve. Funding had not been lost.
- Residual Insurance was the part of the Reserve used for document conservation after the Norwich Library fire. It was money carried forward from the City Council's settlement from its Insurers and would be used for future conservation work.
- The ICT Reserve was for supporting the NRO's on-going requirements and

additions, such as the sound archive.

- 6.3 The Committee asked what the likely impact of the County Council's budget cuts would be on the NRO. The County Archivist clarified that the 'Big Conversation' consultation was currently taking place. The proposed cuts included a reduction in the NRO's budget of £98,000 over 3 years. This would largely be achieved through staff reductions, but would be subject to ongoing review and using natural wastage wherever possible. The Committee would receive a report at its January meeting explaining the outcome of the consultation.

The Vice-Chairman acknowledged that the County Council needed to make savings but that it was important for individuals to comment on the proposals. She encouraged Committee members to respond to the consultation and submit their views, particularly in respect of the proposed reduction in the NRO's budget. She added that members of the public had been finding it difficult to access the consultation document. The County Archivist reported that he had raised this with the Chief Executive's office and stressed that the public could send in their comments by e-mail, freepost or by contacting their County Councillor. Comments on either the specific departmental proposals or the strategic approach of the County Council would be welcomed.

Mrs Gay highlighted that North Norfolk District Council would be providing a corporate response and that it was supportive of the cultural activities of the County Council.

#### 6.4 **Resolved**

To note the report.

### 7. **Risk Register**

- 7.1 The annexed report (7) by the County Archivist was received, which set out the latest version of the Norfolk Record Office's risk register, as revised on 11 November 2010.

- 7.2 During the discussion the following points were made:

- The NRO management team reviewed the risk register every quarter but audit requirements meant the committee only needed to consider a report on a half-yearly basis.
- Risk 1 – Prospects for reducing the risk to an acceptable level remained 'uncertain'. There had been a substantial relaxation in the Heritage Lottery Fund's grant conditions but this was not sufficient reason to review the score. The County Archivist was also actively encouraging people to apply for grants and cited the example of the successful local campaign in Diss to raise money to purchase the Diss Town Lands archive.
- Risk 2 – The score remained high but the prospects for reducing the risk to an acceptable level had changed from 'weak' to 'poor' to reflect the current financial situation across the country.
- Risk 3 – The score remained high but the prospects for reducing the risk to

an acceptable level had changed from 'weak' to 'poor' to reflect the fact that new control measures had been put in place. The efficiency programme for Cultural Services required monthly highlight reports to be produced. The NRO's Budget and Efficiency Board was acting as Project Board for the NRO as part of that corporate programme and this was considered to provide a robust degree of control. Efficiency savings had already been identified. Nonetheless, an element of uncertainty remained which meant the risk remained 'poor'.

- Risk 7 – The prospects for reducing the risk to an acceptable level had changed from 'good' to 'weak' to reflect the need for prudence in the current economic climate. Screen East had recently ceased to operate. It had been a major source of funding for the East Anglian Film Archive, which was a significant partner of the NRO. While the EAFA was quite resilient, being part of the University of East Anglia and therefore able to access other funding streams as well as being awarded significant Heritage Lottery Grants, a risk had been posed. The County Archivist would continue to monitor the situation and report any significant issues to the Committee.
- Risk 8 – New security control measures had been put in place as a result of a visit from the County Council's new Cabinet Member for Culture, Customer Services and Communications.
- Risk 11, relating to the Local Government Review Outcomes, had been removed.
- The County Archivist would include a glossary of terms in future Risk Register reports.

### **7.3 Resolved**

To note the latest version of the Norfolk Record Office's risk register, as revised on 11 November 2010.

## **8. Periodic Report by County Archivist, 1 October 2009 – 31 March 2010**

8.1 The annexed report (10) by the County Archivist was received, which informed the Committee in detail about the activities of the Norfolk Record Office during the period 1 April to 30 September 2010, giving Performance Indicators and listing the accessions received during the period.

8.2 During the discussion the following points were made:

Members asked what the NRO's role was in ensuring that public records from other agencies are preserved. Of particular interest were Environment Agency and Internal Drainage Board (IDB) material, which would be essential for future generations tracing the county's approach to flood defence and include detailed maps. The NRO had an established link with the Environment Agency and the IDB office in King's Lynn following an accession from West Norfolk. However, this had been some years ago and the Principal Archivist agreed that these links should be followed up. The County Archivist added that these type of records were defined as public records under the Public Records Act, 1958 and therefore had to be kept in official places of deposit approved by The National Archives. The Chairman

highlighted that where members of the Committee had a role with other organisations that they should emphasise the importance of record preservation.

- Members discussed the fact that many organisations were downsizing as a result of the current economic climate and were concerned that valuable records might be disposed of. The County Archivist advised that the NRO did have mechanisms for ensuring that public bodies dealt with their records appropriately but agreed that the NRO could undertake a more concerted campaign. He also assured the Committee that the NRO kept an eye on ailing companies and contacted them when appropriate about their records. While Screen East's records were currently required for legal purposes he would ensure the NRO followed this up.
- The consolidation of courts could pose a risk to records being lost. The County Archivist agreed to speak to Dr Kemp outside the meeting and would offer an NRO talk to the Norfolk and Norwich Law Society.
- Members asked whether the NRO's education and outreach programme was likely to be affected by the proposed budget cuts. The County Archivist confirmed that was likely to be a vulnerable area of the NRO's work. The NRO's core mission as an archive service was the preservation of records and to make them accessible. The NRO's view was that outreach and education formed part of accessibility. However, its primary directive was preservation of archives and without that everything else would fail. If the outreach programme were to suffer as a result of the cuts, the NRO's excellent reputation, and therefore its success at winning funding and grants, could be at risk.

Members agreed the county would experience a huge loss if the education and outreach programme suffered. Getting the experience of archives out of the NRO building and beyond Norwich allowed a wider audience an opportunity to enjoy them. The NRO was already generating 'social capital' by bringing forward resources, such as volunteers, and further opportunities for development may present themselves through the Government's 'Big Society' idea.

The Committee thanked the County Archivist and the Principal Archivist and agreed it was extremely important that Members showed their support to the NRO by submitting comments to the County Council's 'Big Conversation' consultation.

### **8.3 Resolved**

To note the report.

## **9. Exclusion of the Public**

- 9.1 The Committee noted the following reasoning for the exclusion of the public and the conclusion in respect of the public interest test:

The NRO bids at auctions and acquires by private treaty sales documents of relevance to Norfolk, which fit within its Collections Policy. The 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. Since public funds are involved in its purchases, the NRO operates a strict value for money policy and strives to pay no more than is 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 NCC’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.

**9.2 Resolved**

To exclude the public from the following item.

**10. Periodic Report: Appendix - Manuscripts Purchases, 1 April-30 September 2010**

10.1 The report gave details of the documents purchased by the Norfolk Record Office during the period from 1 April-30 September 2010.

**10.2 Resolved**

To note the report.

The meeting ended at 12:10 p.m.

**Mrs E Nockolds (Vice-Chairman)**



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