

Norfolk Records Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 January 2011

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

Norwich City Council

Mr P Offord

Great Yarmouth Borough Council

Mrs M Coleman

South Norfolk District Council

Dr C J Kemp

Non-Voting Members

Co-Opted Member

Mr M Begley

Representative of the Bishop of Norwich

Revd C Read

Observer

Dr V Morgan

Representative of the Norfolk Record Society

Dr G A Metters

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from: Mr J Bracey, Mrs V Gay, Mr R Jewson, Mr D Murphy (Chairman), Prof. C Rawcliffe, Mr S Sands and Ms V Thomas, Prof R Wilson.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 November 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. Norfolk Record Office – Performance and Budget Report, April-November 2010/11

- 5.1 The annexed report (5) by the County Archivist was received, which set out performance against service plans and budget out-turns for 2010/11 for the Norfolk Record Office (NRO).
- 5.2 During the discussion the following points were made:

- The Finance and Business Support Manager highlighted that the forecast revenue budget out-turn for the NRO indicated a break-even position. A reduction of premises costs in the region of £60,000 was expected due to the action taken to reduce energy consumption. There were no capital programme matters to report and the Reserves and Provisions position was mostly unchanged from the previous year.
- The County Archivist highlighted that the NRO's Budget and Efficiency Board met weekly and continued to look for ways of working more efficiently.
- The County Archivist also highlighted that the NRO's performance against service plans was good. It continued to increase visitor numbers and attract new audiences.
- Members of the Committee commended the action taken to reduce energy consumption and suggested that this was a good example to share with colleagues across the County Council.
- The Committee congratulated officers on the NRO's good performance and the excellent work that it was doing in partnership with communities around the county.

5.3 **Resolved**

To note:

- 1) Progress with performance against 2010/11 service plans
- 2) Progress with the revenue budget and reserves and provisions for 2010/11

6. **Norfolk Record Office – Service and Budget Planning 2011-14**

6.1 The annexed report (6) by the County Archivist was received, which set out the financial and planning context for the Norfolk Record Office (NRO) for the next 3 years. It also illustrated the feedback received from the specific budget proposals outlined in the Big Conversation.

6.2 During the discussion the following points were made:

- With the exception of the staffing budget, the NRO budget mostly consisted of fixed costs that could not easily be controlled. In order to deliver savings, the NRO was proposing to meet savings targets of £0.098m through staff reductions over the 3-year period. This represented 10.3% of the staffing budget of which £0.036m was proposed to be delivered in 2011/12 from vacancy management and natural wastage. It was confirmed that at the moment there would be no redundancies and that the savings would include some forthcoming retirements.
- Regular briefing meetings had been held with staff to keep them informed.
- Concerns were raised that the paring away of individuals, each of whom had particular areas of expertise, would lead to a substantial deterioration in the type of service that could be provided by the NRO. The County Archivist

commented that the effects of budget savings would be felt by the NRO in the same way as other parts of the organisation. Some individual archivists did have particular skills and the NRO would need to ensure that those were not lost. His aim was to ensure that the public, front-facing service remained as good as it could be. However, some services, such as exhibition programmes, might not be so sophisticated in future.

- Reference was made to previous meetings where the Committee had discussed the need to encourage people to deposit records at the NRO. Concerns were raised that this might be a problem for the NRO if it had fewer staff. The County Archivist commented that preservation of records was a fundamental part of the NRO's operation and would remain a priority. Other elements of the service, such as cataloguing, might slow down as a result of fewer staff, thus facilities such as finding aids might take longer to produce.
- It was suggested that there might be further scope for volunteering opportunities at the NRO through the Government's Big Society idea. This would not replace former employees but would assist the NRO in delivering some of its services. The County Archivist commented that the NRO had a long track record of using volunteers, the numbers of which had grown over the years and would greatly assist the NRO in future.
- There were some Modern Reward Strategy appeals pending, which meant there might be a small variation in the base adjustment figures for the Modern Reward Strategy Compensation and Pension savings set out at appendix 2 of the report.
- Through stringent management of plant, the NRO would be able to make year on year budget savings amounting to £0.070m across the three years and would contribute to the County Council's carbon reduction targets. The design of The Archive Centre building included features such as high thermal inertia, which NRO staff had been able to take advantage of to reduce energy consumption.
- Savings arising from introducing archive storage services and charges would amount to £0.030m. There was a sliding scale for charges for different levels of services ranging from storage to retrieval and access.
- Members of the Committee asked if there were any other opportunities for income generation, such as selling the expertise of NRO staff. The County Archivist commented that there was potential to develop this area, such as the possibility of setting up the conservation unit on a more commercial basis, and that these were being explored.
- Members of the Committee highlighted that suggestions received through the Big Conversation showed there was support for income generation, including the introduction of a charging system to use the archive. The County Archivist agreed that the support for generating additional income from technical facilities was helpful. He was, however, hesitant at charging an admission fee. Where that had been done in other parts of the country it had proven to be counterproductive. At present, customers using the NRO made use of many other chargeable services, which provided a good source of income. Admission fees would adversely affect the NRO's income

stream, since they would cause a drop in user numbers, resulting in a lower take-up of paid-for services. Depositors might also be dissuaded from depositing their records if there were no free access to them. In addition, much of the NRO's external funding had been granted on the basis that access to documents was free, thus this might be challenged.

- Members of the Committee asked whether any meaningful savings would be achieved through the NRO closing on one day of the week or on Saturdays, as suggested in responses to the Big Conversation consultation. The County Archivist explained that closing on a week day and opening all day on a Saturday would cost the NRO more as a result of the Modern Reward Strategy. Discontinuing Saturday opening could make a small saving, in the region of £10,000 to £15,000. However, this was a sensitive issue. The NRO would consider it as an option if the County Council directed it to do so, following consideration of the Big Conversation.
- Some Members commented that all the ideas submitted through the Big Conversation might need to be carried forward and revisited in future years as it was likely the same financial pressures would exist.

6.3 Resolved

To recommend the report to the Cabinet.

The meeting ended at 11.15am

Mrs E Nockolds (Vice-Chairman)



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