

Norfolk Records Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 February 2024 at 10:30am at County Hall, Norwich

Present:

Cllr Michael Chenery of Horsbrugh (Chair)	Norfolk County Council
Cllr Kathryn Cross	South Norfolk District Council
Cllr Phillip Duigan	Norfolk County Council
Cllr Michael Jeal	Great Yarmouth Borough Council
Cllr Robert Kybird (Vice-Chair)	Breckland District Council
Cllr Judith Lubbock	Norwich City Council
Cllr Saul Penfold	North Norfolk District Council
Cllr Ben Price	Norwich City Council
Cllr Simon Ring	Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk

Also present:

Jonathan Draper	Partnership and Development Manager
Dr G. Alan Metters	Representative of the Norfolk Record Society
Revd' Charles Read	Representative of the Bishop of Norwich
Laine Tisdall	Committee Officer
Gary Tuson	County Archivist

1. Apologies and substitutions

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Alison Birmingham, Cllr Grant Nurden, and Alan Steynor. Cllr Sue Sands was also absent.
- 1.2 The Chair welcomed Cllr Judith Lubbock from Norwich City Council, as this was her first meeting as a Committee Member.

2. Minutes

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2023 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair subject to the following correction:
 - Cllr Saul Penfold was erroneously recorded as being present at this meeting when he had sent apologies.
- 2.2 The minutes of the meeting held on 27 October 2023 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 The Chair declared an interest relating to Item 6, as he was a trustee of the Norfolk Archives and Heritage Development Foundation (NorAH).

4. Fees and Charges

4.1 The Committee received the annexed report (4).

4.2 The County Archivist introduced the report to the Committee, which gave an overview of increases being made to the fees and charges for services provided by the Norfolk Record Office (NRO), as these had last been reviewed in 2020.

4.3 A 10% increase on all NRO fees was proposed for 2024/25. The County Archivist acknowledged there were financial pressures which had to be taken into consideration.

4.4 The NRO introduced a digitisation on demand service a few years ago, which had proven successful. Income from this service had increased year-on-year, with £23,000 taken during 2023. At present the fee for the service was set at £18, which would increase to £20 to keep NRO income growing.

4.5 The following points were raised and discussed:

- A Committee Member asked how the 10% increase was decided. The County Archivist explained that as fees had not been reviewed since 2020, the increase was based on inflationary pressures.
- A Committee Member asked how the NRO was supporting groups on lower incomes or Universal Credit to access its services, also querying as to whether the NRO had offered a reduced fee service to said groups. The County Archivist stated that access to the searchroom was completely free. The Committee Member commented that it may be worth the Committee investigating in future whether the costs of the NRO services were inhibiting people's access to them.
- A Committee Member noted that the last increase in NRO charges was four years ago and asked if it was policy to review charges every year. The County Archivist stated that there was not a set period for review, but that another review of fees in 12 months was likely.

4.4 The Norfolk Records Committee **RESOLVED** to **SUPPORT** the new charges as outlined in the appendix of the report.

5. Finance and Risk

5.1 The Committee received the annexed report (5).

5.2 The County Archivist introduced the report to the Committee, which covered the NRO revenue budget for 2023/24, capital programme, reserves, and provisions. An update on the service risk register was also included. A balanced budget was predicted by the end of the current financial year.

5.3 The County Archivist acknowledged that 2024/25 was shaping up to be difficult for the NRO. Originally a £15,000 reduction in the budget was expected, however additional savings of £57,000 were requested in December 2023. Achieving £72,000 in savings would prove challenging for the service. Any proposed changes to the NRO's services would need to go through public consultation, with documentation being prepared at present. It was proposed that between £35,000 to £40,000 of the target would be made through staff savings, while the remainder would be made up through boosting income generation. This would increase the proportion of the NRO's budget from income generation up to 40%.

- 5.4 It was proposed that the limited opening of the searchroom on Fridays be extended to cover Thursdays too. Slots and the documents requested would need to be booked in advance. This would enable the searchroom to run on limited staff levels on these two days. The County Archivist acknowledged that these changes would have a knock-on effect on the full service offered on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, with the possibility that demand may outstrip supply on those days. A consultation would be opened on introducing a booking system for Tuesdays and Wednesdays to manage demand on the service, though this would be a different system to that operated on Thursdays and Fridays. The County Archivist explained there was a balancing act between providing NRO services and retaining skilled staff, but that further sources of income needed to be identified.
- 5.5 The County Archivist gave an outline of Change Minds, which was a partnership between the NRO and the Restoration Trust commencing in 2017. The formation of the project began around a large quantity of records from the old St. Andrew's Hospital in Norwich, which include individual case records, many with photographs. Change Minds worked with a local mental health service provider partner to recruit participants on the course. Participants on Change Minds select a patient from the hospital records who forms the basis of their work as they learn research and creative skills. Interest in Change Minds from outside of Norfolk had been such that a new Scaling Up Change Minds project was launched in 2022 after securing a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF). As well as creating a Change Minds Hub, as part of co-creation, courses had been run in HMP Norwich, King's Lynn, Kent, Preston, Dundee and was currently running in Bristol. A business case to roll out Change Minds further was currently being developed. In addition, the County Archivist was investigating a spin-off project called Change Minds At Work, which would take the content of Change Minds and develop it into a one-day workshop aimed at improving the wellbeing of people in the workplace.
- 5.6 The risk register had not changed considerably since it had previously been brought to the Committee. The risks related to the 2023/24 financial year. Loss or reduction of funding/income was rated as an amber risk, which the County Archivist stated was being worked on. A capital bid had been submitted to the finance department to mitigate the risk of the NRO being unable to continue collecting archives. Work was also continuing on developing procedures and tools to collect digital records.
- 5.7 The following points were raised and discussed:
- The Vice-Chair queried the significant increase in "other" income in 2023, which had enabled the NRO to balance its budget for the current financial year. The County Archivist confirmed the £256,297 figure was formed from several projects, including Change Minds. Some projects were externally funded, including the Norfolk Archaeological Trust exhibition due to be launched on the 5 February, which had brought extra income into the NRO. The County Archivist commented that every NRO activity to generate income was based around the core mission of the service.
 - A Committee Member praised Change Minds and queried as to whether the project had been promoted in local media, as this would create interest in Change Minds At Work. The County Archivist stated that a pilot was being developed to ensure that the basic idea was sound, at which point it would be promoted accordingly. The Eastern Daily Press (EDP) had provided both print

and website coverage of Change Minds. Norman Lamb, the former MP for North Norfolk, had visited a session, while the project was also featured in the National Archives Year in Archives publication. To scale up Change Minds, the NRO was working alongside the UEA to get literature into the healthcare sector. In addition, the County Archivist was talking to the National Archives, Welsh Assembly Government, and the Scottish Council of Archives. It was also noted that Change Minds had received significant support from the Norfolk Archives and Heritage Development Foundation (NorAH).

- A Committee Member asked the County Archivist if he was confident the quality of the NRO's services could be maintained given the significant budget pressures that had been identified. The County Archivist admitted that the quality and quantity of services would decline with reduced resources. The NRO had an obligation to the residents of Norfolk and future generations to collect, preserve and make accessible archives. The service would still be able to achieve these obligations, however this would be at a reduced level, with increased pressures on current offerings. The Committee Member expressed concern that the core obligations of the NRO would be at risk if current budget pressures continued year-on-year. The County Archivist stated that the NRO was an accredited archive service and that accreditation was dependent on certain levels being maintained. Opening hours were incrementally getting closer to the lower limit for accredited status.
- Committee Members thanked the County Archivist for his efforts in operating the NRO over the past couple of years but expressed concern about potential risks diminishing the ability of the service to accession new material, which would slow down income over time. The County Archivist acknowledged that cuts could not be made to areas which generated income. The new income generation target posed a substantial risk to balancing the budget, which could require the NRO's reserves being used to make up any shortfall. A Committee Member asked how much income generation was predicted for 2024/25 and what percentage of reserves would be needed to cover any shortfall. The County Archivist stated that income was predicted to increase between £35,000 to £40,000, dependent on the staff reduction proposal. This would account for approximately 30% to 40% of the NRO's reserves possibly needing to be allocated for the next financial year. Concerns were expressed that this would place additional pressures on the NRO, particularly for the next set of budget cycles.
- The Vice-Chair suggested that the NRO contact Jamie Everitt from SHARE Museums East or their successor from April 2024 regarding pathways for wellbeing, as they offered courses for accredited museums and archives. The County Archivist stated this was a promising idea for Change Minds at Work as any new audience was welcome.
- A Committee Member stated that the savings required from the NRO were about the same as those in other districts. There were more organisations than ever now relying on income generation rather than government subsidiaries, which had the effect of making local authorities more business-like and proactive. It was important that heritage assets were sweated and promoted correctly to achieve the optimum financial outcome. The work being done by the NRO was excellent, but there was more that could be done. The Committee Member expressed

concern that Change Minds At Work was being aimed at the wrong target market, suggesting that the project be aimed at teambuilding events and the pre-retirement market as these were an untapped industry. The County Archivist clarified that Change Minds At Work was aimed at these groups whereas the Change Mind project from which it had grown was aimed at people with mental health issues. The Chair commented that this would be an interesting line to follow up, citing his own experience with the pre-retirement market during his time in the NHS.

- Committee Members stated that additional Local Government Settlement funding had been announced by Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, on the 24 January. Although most of the funding had been earmarked for Children's Services and Adult Social Care, Committee Members pondered as to whether there had been conversations with finance officers towards any extra funding for the NRO. The County Archivist stated this had been raised at management meetings, but that nothing had been heard about extra funding for the NRO. Cllr Ben Price proposed that the County Archivist approach finance officers at the Council to investigate whether any funding from the additional local government settlement announced on the 24 January could be allocated to the NRO to mitigate proposed reductions to its services. This was seconded by Cllr Saul Penfold. After a short debate, this was unanimously **APPROVED** by Committee Members on a show of hands.
- A Committee Member asked if the timetable of the public consultation could be clarified, expressing concern that jobs at the NRO could be at risk. The County Archivist confirmed that the consultation was due to be launched later in February and information would be fed back to officers and Cabinet accordingly. The Council had a legal obligation to produce a balanced budget. Approximately 93% of the NRO's budget was spent on staff, meaning that there would be a reduction in staff following the consultation, but how this would be achieved in practice was unknown at present.
- A Committee Member stated he would be interested in hearing the outcome of the NRO's capital bid to increase storage space at the Archive Centre, as the risk of the service not being able to accept new archives was increasing every year.
- A Committee Member suggested that AI technology represented a potential opportunity to augment resources towards cataloguing, particularly in the digital to digital domain. The County Archivist confirmed there had been dialogue with the Council's IT department about this, with a trial taking place using AI software to extract data from digital images.
- A Committee Member stated he had written to the Monitoring Officers at both Norfolk County Council and Norwich City Council suggesting that recordings of committee and panel meeting be stored digitally, as they could be of historical use in the future. The County Archivist confirmed that the NRO would accept digital deposits, however additional resources would need to be allocated. If councils wanted to deposit, the NRO could store their recordings. The Vice-Chair suggested that the Committee write to district councils and ask what their long-term plans for digital record storage were. The Committee **AGREED** that the Chair would write a letter to each district council to gauge if there was interest in this proposal.

5.4 Having considered and commented on the report, the Norfolk Records Committee **RESOLVED** the following:

1. **NOTED** the forecast position of the revenue budget, reserves, and provisions.
2. **NOTED** the management of risk for 2023/24.
3. **PROPOSED** that the County Archivist consult with financial officers to see if any funding from the additional Local Government Settlement announced on the 24 January 2024 could be allocated to the NRO to mitigate proposed savings in its 2024/25 budget.
4. **AGREED** that the Chair write a letter to district councils to explore what their digital record storage policies were and whether they would consider the NRO storing their digital recordings of committee meetings.

6. Norfolk Archives and Heritage Development Foundation (NorAH)

6.1 The Committee received the annexed report (6).

6.2 An officer introduced the report, which provided the Committee with an overview of the work of the Norfolk Archives and Heritage Development Foundation (NorAH).

6.3 NorAH was established in 2016, coinciding with an auction of private archives. The first act of the charity was a fundraising campaign to raise money to bid for the documents at auction. Currently there were 10 trustees, including the Chair of the Norfolk Records Committee. Being a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), with a charitable purpose as an educational charity, NorAH aimed to achieve this overall objective by giving grants to the NRO and partner organisations to support their work to collect, conserve and make documents worthy of permanent preservation available to the public.

6.4 NorAH had made 31 grants to date, which totalled just over £60,700. The biggest beneficiary to date was the NRO, having received 17 grants totalling £54,800. NorAH has also provided grants to 12 other beneficiaries, including the Norfolk Heritage Centre, Norwich Cathedral Library, the Wise Archive, and several Norfolk-based community archives.

6.5 The following points were raised and discussed:

- A Committee Member expressed appreciation for the work of NorAH in acquiring records and keeping them in the public domain, but requested an overview of the checks and balances system in place which ensured the charity was being operated correctly. An officer stated NorAH was registered with the Charity Commission, who required a report of activities and accounts to be submitted to them annually. Trustees would oversee and sign off any undertakings by the charity. In addition, there was a strenuous system of background checks before any new trustees were appointed. The charity also had a treasurer in place to oversee financial procedures, such as when donations over a certain amount were made.
- A Committee Member asked if NorAH was a standalone entity or whether the Council had any oversight or responsibilities towards the charity. An officer confirmed that advice was sought from NP Law before NorAH was established, who recommended that the charity be standalone from the Council. There was a

maximum of 12 trustees overseeing NorAH, 10 positions of which were open to anyone with the right skills and aptitude. The Chair of the Norfolk Records Committee is an ex officio trustee, and the Norfolk Records Committee the option to nominate a trustee, which it had not yet currently taken up.

- A Committee Member asked if NorAH had “friends” involvement. An officer stated that other archives across the country traditionally had friends organisations providing assistance via collecting documents or providing voluntary assistance to staff, but many such organisations did not raise money. A supporters’ scheme was currently operating, where members receive benefits including free photography permits to use at the NRO. In addition, NorAH run a number of special events throughout the year for scheme members. Details of the events calendar for 2024 were provided to the Committee.
- The Vice-Chair asked if charitable donations were eligible for Gift Aid. An officer confirmed this was the case.

6.5 Having considered and commented accordingly, the Norfolk Records Committee **RESOLVED** to **NOTE** the report.

The meeting closed at 12:11

**Cllr Michael Chenery of Horsbrugh, Chair
Norfolk Records Committee**



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