

## **The Archive Sector: Challenges and Opportunities**

### **Purpose**

For discussion and direction.

### **Summary**

The National Archives (TNA) is a non-ministerial government department, whose parent department is the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The National Archives leads over 2,500 archives in England – over 200 of which are places of deposit; and supports over 100 local authority archives in England.

TNA and LGA are strategic partners who work together to share good practice approaches and to support archive services in finding ways to adapt to the mutual challenges that they face: digital transformation, workforce capabilities and financial resilience. This includes supporting their contribution to the achievement of local educational, economic and wellbeing outcomes.

Jeff James, Chief Executive of The National Archives, will present to the Board. The attached TNA briefing paper sets out background information, summarises latest delivery models in the archive sector and suggests shared priorities for LGA and TNA to take forward.

Ahead of DCMS formally launching a consultation on the government policy for archives, this Board meeting is an early opportunity for Members to give a steer on how TNA can best work with the LGA and local government to support the archive sector.

### **Recommendation**

Members are invited to discuss the issues raised in The National Archives' briefing paper and to offer an early steer on shared priorities for TNA's new strategy.

### **Action**

To be taken forward by officers, as directed by Members.

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## The National Archives

### **The Archive Sector: Challenges and Opportunities**

#### **The role of the National Archives**

1. The National Archives is the official archive and publisher for UK government and for England & Wales. We are a non-ministerial government department that sits within the Department for Culture, Media and Sport family. The DCMS minister responsible for The National Archives is Baroness Neville-Rolfe.
2. The National Archives is the custodian of the government record and iconic historical documents. We collect and preserve both digital and physical records, and make them accessible and available. We lead the archive sector in England and perform the Historical Manuscripts Commission functions in relation to records in private (independent) ownership. We also develop and promote standards and best practice in all aspects of archive management.
3. *Archives Inspire*, our ambitious four-year strategy launched in 2015, sets out what The National Archives will do to meet the needs of each of our major audiences: government, the public, the archive sector, and research and academics, and tackling our biggest challenge – digital. For the archive sector, we are actively supporting archives to face mutual challenges – in securing the best possible long-term future for their collections and services and in identifying sustainable solutions for the long-term.
4. The National Archives aims to lead the sector in finding the capacity to build new digital skills and infrastructure. In 2015, we were the major funder of the [Digital Preservation Handbook](#) and ran a workshop for the sector to share learning and best practice. Despite the challenges, we are leading a sector that is innovative and keen to seize opportunities in relation to digital transformation and innovation.

#### **The Archive sector**

5. The archive sector in the UK is a rich variety of national, regional and local archives. There are over 2,500 archives in England – over 200 of these are Places of Deposit (repositories that hold certain classes of public records which are not held at The National Archives), and 75 are university collections.
6. Archives form an important part of the wider cultural landscape often within the context of a museum, university or library offer. This diverse landscape is managed through a number of networks: local authorities; museums; libraries; private individuals; charitable and commercial bodies.

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7. In 2015, the Local Government Association (LGA) and The National Archives published [Transforming Local Archive Services](#), showcasing 13 local authority archives, it aimed to demonstrate the contribution local archives make to the local authorities' agendas of financial resilience, community engagement, local transparency and accountability.
8. The National Archives and the LGA are key strategic partners. We work in partnership to support the preservation of the public record, to develop essential tools in delivering local transparency and accountability, and to develop community cohesion. The importance of the public record has been highlighted by matters of significant public interest, for example, the findings of [Hillsborough Independent Panel](#).
9. Many of the nation's archives are of national and international significance, such as the [Lincolnshire Archives](#), [Norfolk Records Office](#), [Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums](#), and the [Liverpool Records Office](#). These archives form an important part of the local cultural offer and contribute to the visitor economy through cultural, heritage, ancestral and educational tourism.

#### **Local councils and the archive sector**

10. Local councils have been at the forefront of supporting, conserving and promoting the nation's archives. The National Archives supports over 100 local authority archives in England. Throughout the UK in recent years, many local councils have supported the creation of landmark buildings that have showcased important collections, offered new facilities and activities to benefit the whole community e.g. [Archives+](#) in Manchester and [Kent History and Library Centre](#), Maidstone, Kent. Archives can be part of a wider council-led regeneration and play an important role in helping communities embrace change by firmly locating history, heritage and community identity at the heart of urban regeneration. These developments have also supported the visitor economy and created a strong sense of place and a focus for the positive expressions of local identities.
11. Many local council archives are relatively small services that do not therefore benefit from economies of scale. Over the recent period some archive services will have seen reduced opening hours, changes to their cultural education and outreach offers and in some cases, the loss of essential specialist posts such as conservators.

#### **The National Archives support for the sector**

12. The National Archives supports the archive sector – including local authority archives – in a range of ways:
  - 12.1 [Fundraising for Archives \(2015\)](#) A HLF-funded project. This two-year programme provides tailored training and mentoring to 96 archives and a further 450 places on day sessions. The programme addresses key fundraising skills and mentors participants to apply them to their real challenges. Many of the skills addressed will be of value beyond fundraising i.e. business planning, advocacy. We had a very strong response to the programme, 23 places were allocated to Local Authority archives, with another 15 due to participate through our open call application process.

- 12.2 [Income Generation Guidance \(2016\)](#) This publication details how archives can use their collections, spaces and expertise to generate earned income, explores areas including licensing, image sales, events, storage space, and specialist services such as conservation. The guidance has been co-created with the sector, to showcase good practice examples – while striking a realistic note on the constraints on income generation, so as to support managers to create achievable plans for the future.
- 12.3 [Commissioning](#): a pilot programme (2015) explored the opportunities of commissioning for archives. This guidance aimed to set out the work needed to engage commissioners (to develop an ‘offer’) and generated practical guidance and case studies. The guidance illustrated that commissioning is a time-intensive process that may not bring immediate financial returns. However, the process of engaging with commissioners can be valuable to profile-raising for archives and in helping key stakeholders understand the role archives can play in meeting key local and community objectives. As a result of the pilot project, Wigan Archives service was commissioned to provide volunteering opportunities to people recovering from addiction.

### **The way ahead for local authority archives**

13. Local authorities are increasingly open to new partnerships and ways of delivering services. The National Archives has provided advice and support so that each council can find the best solution for its local circumstances, and one that takes account of the specific needs of an archive service. Our work includes:
- 13.1 [Governance](#): Many councils are moving archive services into third party arrangements such as trusts and mutuals. The National Archives’ published guidance [In a Spin](#) (2014), to support archives in their decision making and planning, ran masterclasses and provided tailored advice and support. The guidance has met with very positive feedback from senior managers of cultural services (not just archives) as it addresses broad and fundamental issues of relevance to all type of services.
- 13.2 [Collaborative service networks](#): The National Archives has invested in the development of regional networks of archives. We currently support networks in Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, London, Southern England and the East of England. Our investment supports six months of facilitated discussion to agree strategic priorities, develop a work plan and establish a governance structure with senior management commitment. The work plan focuses on ‘quick wins’ in the first 12 months to secure the partnership, and can then move on to tackle more complex issues such as digital preservation. Benefits have been quickly realised – including £74,000 HLF grant to archives in Greater Manchester for cataloguing business records, and development of a joint image sales platform for London archives. Over the next two years, we hope to have established networks across the whole of England, and to share good practice between the networks.

- 13.3 Partnership in Higher Education: The National Archives holds Independent Research Organisation status, and has a strategic focus on developing collaborative relations between the HE and archive sectors. We aim to position archives at the heart of the knowledge-based economy. We showcase examples of the benefits these partnership bring to the locality, as witnessed in the successful partnership of the [Hull History Centre](#), a purpose-built landmark building and visitor attraction. Through our strategic focus we support partnership developments locally, regionally and nationally. Our HE current initiatives include guidance on developing partnerships, [Discovering Communities](#), [Discovering Collections](#), our flagship annual conference and [Higher Education Archives Programme](#).

### **The government's policy for Archives**

14. The previous government policy – [Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century](#) – was published in 2009 and refreshed in 2012. Last year an [independent review](#) found that much progress had been made in increasing digital access and delivering effective commercial and cultural partnerships. It also highlighted some of the emerging strategic priorities facing the archive sector – digital transformation, financial resilience, workforce capabilities and sector leadership. The time is now right to build on those successes by shaping a new future for archives in England.
15. Over the coming months, The National Archives will be hosting a series of roundtable events for archive professionals, organisations, funders and key stakeholders from the cultural, creative, commercial and digital sectors. The Minister responsible for The National Archives, Baroness Neville-Rolfe, has made clear her support for this work and will be addressing some of the engagement events to encourage the sector to help shape the new strategy and future priorities. We expect her to formally announce the consultation on the new strategy, in autumn 2016. We hope that you will encourage your senior managers and archive staff to contribute to our on-line and engagement roundtable events.

### **The LGA and local council archives**

16. The LGA can play an important role in supporting local authority archives to thrive and engage with their local communities into the future via the following strands:

16.1 Digital transformation:

16.1.1 sharing best practice of digital service transformation

16.1.2 ensuring where archives are co-located with libraries, that they have access to digital reporting tools such as *LG Inform*

16.1.3 enabling and supporting partnerships and applications

16.1.4 supporting archives through shared digital provision to establish a web presence and to gain access to new digital platforms

16.1.5 developing capabilities to improve efficiency and service delivery.

#### 16.2 Financial resilience:

LGA members can help support and build the evidence case for archives to establish their social, cultural and economic impact by:

16.2.1 supporting archives to achieve greater visibility locally and nationally, to attract new users, and to use local insight into local needs and draw-up evidence based plans for optimal service provision

16.2.2 exploring further opportunities for shared services and combined authorities

16.2.3 supporting archives through training, shadowing and mentoring

16.2.4 exploring other opportunities for income generation, both public and private

16.2.5 promoting the role of archives in the devolution agenda and the local cultural economies in supporting the development of local history, regional identity, community cohesion, transparency and accountability.

#### 16.3 Workforce capabilities:

LGA members can help develop the workforce (archivists, volunteers and management) by building the capacity, skills and knowledge base of the archive sector by:

16.3.1 supporting apprenticeships across the archive sector to build skills

16.3.2 building local cultural apprenticeships across cultural services to support small archives services – for example, Camden Council is working with The Knowledge Quarter in Kings Cross, London to develop a [Knowledge Quarter Higher Apprenticeship scheme](#). (The Knowledge Quarter includes archives, museums, libraries, universities and commercial companies)

16.3.3 supporting the development of partnership eco-systems, foster collaboration, peer-learning and best practice through peer-review.