

Item 2

National Support for Local Authority Archives

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This paper updates members on the Culture Minister's recent announcement that support and leadership for the UK's archive sector will transfer to The National Archives (TNA) from April 2012 following the closure of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA).

The Board will receive a presentation from Oliver Morley, Chief Executive of The National Archives, about their new role and what it might mean for local authority archives.

Recommendation

Members to agree the next steps set out in paragraph 11.

Action

To be taken forward by officers as directed by Members.

Contact officer: Laura Caton
Position: Business Manager
Phone no: 020 7664 3154
E-mail: laura.caton@local.gov.uk

National Support for Local Authority Archives

Background

1. Support and leadership for the UK's archive sector will transfer to The National Archives (TNA) from April 2012 following the closure of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). TNA is a government department and an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice. As the official archives of the UK government, it cares for and makes available a vast collection of over 1,000 years of historical records.
2. There are well over 2,000 bodies, both public and private, that hold regularly accessible archives in the UK including universities, local authorities and other institutions.
3. MLA's current role involves acting as an advocate for the sector and helping archives improve their services and public access. Challenges include the growing need to manage digital information, promoting an innovative approach to delivering the highest standards in service with reduced resources, and responding to public demand for online access to digitised content.
4. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is now working with The National Archives and the MLA on the transfer of responsibilities and the timing of the transfer. TNA and MLA are also working with Arts Council England on cross cultural sector initiatives involving museums, libraries and archives.

Local archives

5. Over 130 local authorities provide archive services, local studies and local history libraries. The collections of unique records in their care document a community's identity. There are over one million visits to local authority archives each year. Many books, magazines, plays, films, television, radio and websites rely on information from archives – much of it in the care of local authorities. Local authorities also have a legal responsibility to look after their records, charged by statute to 'make proper arrangements' for them.
6. Local authorities hold records of national and international importance. These include the official records that underpin democracy and the records of the lives of ordinary people, businesses and local life that add colour and texture to the official record. And it's not just paper and parchment. Most local authority collections contain photographs, maps, plans, prints, drawings, sound recordings, moving images, microfilm and digital records. Together these unique records provide sources of inspiration, enjoyment and learning.

Item 2

7. Creatively used, working in partnership with a range of services, archives can help local authorities tackle key issues. As part of learning programmes and community outreach they can help combat social exclusion and support educational achievement. Through regeneration, they can contribute to improving local economies and building a strong sense of community. Together with records management, archives can deliver business and administrative efficiencies.
8. In common with other local cultural services, local archives are facing significant financial pressures. The challenge is to provide a high quality and efficient local archives service that gives as many people as possible the opportunity to enrich their cultural and learning experiences by accessing local archives.
9. The best local archive services are integrated as part of a broad local cultural offer and have strong partnerships with schools, other local cultural organisations and community groups. Local archives are also responding to and embracing external pressures, including public expectations to access information on-line and the demand for greater flexibility in the services and products on offer. Some good practice examples can be found at item 11 – CLOA case studies.

Suggested issues for discussion with The National Archives

10. This discussion is an early opportunity for the Board to start a dialogue with Oliver Morely, the Chief Executive of TNA, about what TNA's new role might mean for councils. Members might like to share the following key points:
 - 10.1 **Councils will be keen to be consulted on and involved with the transfer from MLA to TNA.** How is TNA consulting with councils and the professional bodies and what is the timeframe? Securing strong buy-in from Portfolio Holders with responsibility for local archives will be especially important.
 - 10.2 **The way forward for local archives needs to reflect the radically different service context within which councils are operating.** In particular, budget pressures mean that it will be even more important that national and local leaders are able to articulate the value of local archive services and their contribution to wider community outcomes. How can TNA support this? Local cultural services are increasingly becoming providers of services commissioned by others, and might commission others to deliver on their behalf. What does this mean for local archives?

Item 2

10.3 **We want to see any national resource to support local archives organised in a way that supports sector-led improvement, maximises front line impact and gives councils and local partnerships the flexibility to spend public money in a way that best supports their local area.** Local cultural organisations must work together to lead their own improvement and development. The focus of this work should be to develop new governance and delivery models that can adapt to reduced funding, and which open up local archives in a way that makes them a cornerstone of the Big Society. The LG Group could play a role helping to identify and share good practice examples. What can archives learn from the Future Libraries Programme? Are there also potential links with the LG Group / English Heritage local heritage modernisation programme?

10.4 Local archive services are often part of local museum or library services; given national government support for the latter is now the responsibility of the Arts Council, **how can we ensure that the national conversation on archives continues to reflect a joined-up local cultural offer?**

Conclusion and next steps

11. It's suggested that following the Board's discussion, the Chair of the Board writes to the Chief Executive of TNA to suggest a local government 'offer' on archives: setting out how the LG Group and councils could contribute towards the review and initial thoughts on the future of local archives.

Financial Implications

12. The results of the Board's discussion will feed into discussions about the shape of the Group's improvement offer on culture.