

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES CABINET BOARD

19 NOVEMBER 2015

Report of the Head of Legal Services

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: All Wards

Archive Collaboration Project

Purpose of the Report

1. The report seeks the support of Members for the development of an archives collaboration with other local authorities and Swansea University.

Executive Summary

2. The Archive Service for this authority is provided through a joint committee which runs the West Glamorgan Archive Service. This service covers Neath Port Talbot and Swansea. Officers have been discussing an enlarged collaboration with Carmarthenshire County Council and Swansea University in order to further develop the service and provide a replacement records repository in preparation for when Civic Centre Swansea is disposed of. The report seeks the support of Cabinet Board to pursue this project further.

Background

3. Since local government reorganisation in 1996 the Archive Service for Neath Port Talbot and Swansea has been a joint service of those two authorities and is subject to a joint committee. Carmarthenshire County Council has run its own service albeit that there are some operational difficulties there at the moment. As members would expect, Swansea University has an extensive library but also is the custodian to certain archive collections deposited with it.
4. There are two main strategic drivers setting the framework for this report: firstly, the scale of the financial challenge faced by West Glamorgan Archive Service's two parent authorities and secondly, the projected sale in the medium term future of Swansea Civic Centre where the archive collections are housed.
5. West Glamorgan Archive Service (WGAS) has a good track record in facing change and has risen to become one of the best performing local authority archive services in Wales. In particular:
6. WGAS is by far the most visited local authority archive service in Wales, with figures for individual reader visits 78% higher than any other Welsh local authority service in 2013/14 and the 12th highest in the UK (source CIPFA)
7. WGAS rose from being a two-star to a four-star service during the period of The National Archives self-assessment 2005-2010 (a measure of overall performance) and rose to 23rd in the league table for local authority archives in England and Wales, before the self-assessment process was replaced by Archives Accreditation.
8. WGAS holds the only Welsh local authority-held collection inscribed on the UNESCO UK Register of the Memory of the World Programme. This is the Neath Abbey Ironworks collection.
9. In order to meet the challenges, WGAS is now planning for a period of transformation, with fresh thinking about how it delivers its service in the face of a reducing budget. The key element in its plan is to bring together distinct and separate archive services into a regional partnership, streamlining operations and removing duplication. There are existing models (e.g. new archive facilities in Hull, Brighton, Worcester amongst

others) which show that unity of purpose in a shared facility can be achieved without the loss of a distinct identity for each contributing service. Working together in a unified, more efficient way the Archives would be better placed to deliver a sustainable service fit for the twenty-first century during what promises to be a prolonged period of financial contraction.

10. Since August 2014, managers and archive practitioners from Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Carmarthenshire Councils have been meeting with their counterparts at Swansea University to develop a partnership proposal. The meetings have received advice and sponsorship from Welsh Government Museums Archives and Libraries Division. The principal aim of the group is to investigate the potential for a new shared building that is able to provide proper care for and equitable access to all the partners' archive collections. A replacement archive repository will involve meeting British Standard PD5454 in order to maintain its status as a place of deposit for public records.
11. The parent bodies of all three archive services have strong strategic and operational drivers providing a common need for innovative development of their archive operations. These needs include accommodation issues, audience development aspirations, funding constraints, and the ambition to exploit effectively the opportunities offered by digital technologies. Key to the discussion is that Carmarthenshire Council is seeking options for replacing its structurally inadequate archive building in Parc Myrddin, Carmarthen; Swansea University is seeking both to provide improved archive accommodation for the Richard Burton Archives and to relocate the South Wales Miners Library from Hendrefoilan; while WGAS requires a plan for its relocation on the impending sale of Swansea Civic Centre.
12. In the summer of 2015, Welsh Government commissioned a piece of work from archive consultant Elizabeth Oxborrow-Cowan to investigate the potential for such a partnership, which reported positively on the potential synergies between the members of the group. In brief summary, the conclusion of the report was that WGAS was considered to be key to the development of a tripartite partnership, also being in a strong position to develop bipartite relationships with either Carmarthenshire Council or Swansea University should a tripartite approach not prove possible. The highest potential for service excellence was perceived to be if all three

partners were to combine forces to create a shared facility along the lines of existing examples of co-located regional archive services.

13. The group has developed the following mission statement:
14. 'By 2020 we will create an innovative combined archive service for Carmarthenshire Archive Service, the Richard Burton Archives and West Glamorgan Archive Service. It will be located in a purpose-built facility in the Swansea Bay City Region and will be a focus for civic pride. The new service will be known and valued by diverse audiences, bringing together our local and academic communities to foster opportunities for research and exchange. This service will professionally manage, employ and develop the totality of our rich collections to meet stakeholders' needs and ensure the ongoing curation of the region's documentary heritage, celebrating its cultural and linguistic diversity. It will radically exploit digital and analogue technologies to create a range of relevant amenities and products for audiences ranging from the local to the international. This will be a high profile organisation, grounded in excellence, with a strong service ethos and a culture of innovation from which others can learn. It will be funded from a diverse range of income streams and will be creative in how it accesses and uses resources.'

Financial Impact

15. The Archive Service must comply with the budgetary requirements of the local authorities concerned in the current collaboration ie Neath Port Talbot and Swansea. In widening the collaboration to take in the university and Carmarthenshire County Council it is possible that opportunities for savings will arise. Officers have emphasised in discussions with other parties that no additional budget will be available and savings will be necessary in accordance with the Council's budgetary requirements. The City and County of Swansea Plan Sustainable Swansea: Fit for the Future provides for savings of up to 50% on the peak Archive Service budget between 2016/17 and 2018/19.

Equality Impact Assessment

16. An Equality Assessment Screening Form has been completed and it has been concluded that the majority of impacts are low or not applicable.

The location of the access point(s) is yet to be decided. No Equality Impact has been completed.

Workforce Impacts

17. There are none for this Authority since the staff are employed by City and County of Swansea.

Legal Impacts

18. The service is currently provided through a joint committee in collaboration with City and County of Swansea. Other vehicles for collaboration will need to be identified as the project progresses.

Risk Management

19. It is not possible to do nothing since alternative provision needs to be made to house the service in the event that City and County of Swansea dispose of the current premises.

Consultation

20. There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendations

21. MEMBERS ARE REQUESTED:
22. To note the progress that has been made in discussions with Carmarthenshire County Council and Swansea University since 2014 and endorse their continuation in order to produce an option incorporating a viable business model for a co-located single public service;
23. To note the savings of up to 50% on peak Archive Service budget (2013/14) required between 2016/17 and 2018/19 as part of the service transformation programme Sustainable Swansea: Fit for the Future;
24. To note that relocation of the archives from Swansea Civic Centre will involve meeting the British Standard for archive storage PD5454 in its new premises if the Service is to retain its status as a Place of Deposit for

public records (magistrates courts, coroner's etc) and achieve the UK Archives Accreditation Standard.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

25. The reasons for the proposed decision are, firstly, to obtain the views of Members on the proposal and, secondly to obtain their support for the further development of the project.

Implementation of Decision

26. The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call in period.

Appendices

27. None

List of Background Papers

28. Welsh Government report Partnership Model for West Wales Archive Service Delivery.

Officer Contact

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