

# Cheshire East Council

# Cheshire West and Chester Council

## Shared Services Joint Committee

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**Date of Meeting:** 26 November 2021

**Report Title:** Archives Relocation Project: development phase update

**Senior Officer:** Paul Newman, Archives and Local Studies Manager

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### 1. Report Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide an update in relation to the Archives project, particularly in respect of the extensive community engagement and pilot activities that have taken place over the course of 2021.
- 1.2 This report provides the information that the shared service is required to provide to the Shared Services Joint Committee and/or Joint Officer Board under the Shared Services Agreement.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the current status of the project.

### 3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 To update members on the current status of the 'Cheshire's archives: a story shared' project, funded by Cheshire East Council, Cheshire West and Chester Council and the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF).

### 4. Background

- 4.1 The Archives and Local Studies Service is currently based at the Cheshire Record Office, Duke Street, Chester. The current facility is no longer fit for purpose and needs to be replaced to maintain Accredited Archive status. The requirement to relocate the Archives and Local Studies Service has been recognised by both authorities and a new future service delivery model agreed. This model sees two new history centres being established in Chester and Crewe, alongside improved service delivery in libraries, extended online services and a more extensive activity and event programme.

4.2 A development phase grant application for £544,900 was submitted to NLHF in May 2019. This was successful and permission to start the project was granted in March 2020.

4.2 The project is managed through an approved governance arrangement for the shared project. The current development funding, matched by contributions from the two councils, is delivering:

- Extensive consultation with communities across both Boroughs to inform the delivery phase programme and grant application.
- Piloting of activities to engage new audiences with archives across the county.
- The development of detailed plans (to Royal Institute of British Architects RIBA Stage 3) for the proposed new centres in Chester and Crewe, including proposals for interpretation of the collections in exhibitions and in digital formats.
- A detailed business plan.
- A delivery phase funding application.

4.4 Central to the success of the project and the grant application will be an ambitious activity plan, based on detailed engagement with communities and target audiences for the project. Themes within this plan are

- More diverse range of people engaging in different ways with archives.
- Transforming access to collections.
- Developing learning opportunities.
- Health and wellbeing.
- Developing and exchanging skills.

Target audiences for the project are currently

- Existing users of the service
- Families
- Schools and students in further/higher education
- ‘Cultural independent attenders’ – adults aged 30-55 who are not currently archive users
- Socially disadvantaged adults (eg through health/social isolation)
- Audiences currently under-represented in the collections and user base (eg people from BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) communities; LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer) communities).

4.5 Since March, extensive consultation, in the form of workshops, informal meetings and surveys, has been taking place with these target audiences. Messages emerging from this consultation include

- People from all audiences are really interested in understanding more about their ‘place’ (e.g. their street or their place of work and how this has evolved over time).

- People are interested in engaging with archives in a way which is creative and/or active. For example, people responded positively to proposals around engaging with archives through performance or walks.
- Young people are particularly interested in engaging with heritage in a way which is either watching people 'do' things (eg conservation), participating in a way which is creative (eg theatre) or which supports their future employability.
- People have told the team that digital access is really important and that it should be instant and intuitive; access to original archives, however, is also very important to people.
- People see the proposed new centres as places in which a lot of these things can happen. Although they want digital and local access they also want a place to collaborate with others, to see performances, to visit exhibitions, to do research and to know that their written heritage is being looked after.

4.6 The project has also been piloting new digital activities and tools for engaging more people, and a more diverse range of people, with archives. The Archives team have, for example, developed:

- Online exhibitions for LGBTQ History Month and Black History Month.
- Live, web-based, training for community history groups.
- An online training programme for library staff to help them develop their knowledge about the local history collections in their libraries and to support people who visit libraries to research family and local history.
- A range of new resources such as quizzes and family history activities which are aimed at supporting interaction between different generations within families during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Online events such as a 'Taste of History' event which used recipes held within the archive collections as the basis for a 'cookalong' event, with healthy eating and locally-sourced produce at its core.
- Walks which enable people to listen to oral history recordings at various points along the route via their mobile device.
- Events which encourage people to share their histories, with a view to capturing these for preservation and future access.

4.7 Design team meetings are being held to undertake more detailed work on the proposed centres in Chester and Crewe. This work will need to be progressed to RIBA Stage 2 by the middle of November 2021 with RIBA Stage 3 starting early in 2022. Public consultation is currently included in the project plan as part of RIBA Stage 3. Arrangements for consultation will be developed by the Project Board in accordance with the Council guidelines and project governance arrangements.

4.8 An Interpretation Plan is being developed, which will:

- Provide a detailed plan for how the stories from the archives and local studies collections will be told in both history centres.

- Detail how these stories will be told digitally and in local libraries to reach an audience across the county and further afield.
- Propose a methodology for engaging residents to capture the 'community memory' to enhance the stories being told as a result of this project.

As reported in February, the Archives team have identified and digitised items for Wharton, Lache, Nantwich, Malpas, Bollington and Sandbach. These have formed the basis for a pilot website which serves as a 'way-in' to archives for new audiences. This was advertised via social media and consultation took place in September-October 2021. Feedback was positive and will inform the next stage of design development.

- 4.9 Progress reviews with NLHF are being held approximately every 3 months; these will help to mitigate any risks to the delivery phase application. A formal review is currently scheduled to be held in December 2021. This is a pass/fail review, after which building and interpretation designs can be progressed from RIBA Stage 2 to RIBA Stage 3.
- 4.10 Workshops for elected members to update them on progress to date have been arranged for November/December.

## **5. Implications of the Recommendations**

### **5.1 Legal Implications**

- 5.1.1 Advice on compliance with grant terms and conditions, the Councils financial and contract procedure rules and on contracts will be sought for the development stage of the project including where necessary appointment of consultants to assist with development of detailed plans to RIBA Stage 3. Legal advice will also be sought on future funding bids to ensure appropriate governance approval.

### **5.2 Finance Implications**

- 5.2.1 Match funding of £592,000 for the development stage is in place, made up of an equal contribution from each Council. Funding for the delivery stage is referenced in both programmes, subject to further approvals. The final scheme and future revenue implications would also require approval if the delivery phase funding application was successful.
- 5.2.2 Each Council currently has match funding referenced in its capital programme pipeline, based on an NLHF contribution of £4.5 million. Initial cost estimates are currently higher than the current financial envelope and any increase will need to be considered as part of each Council's capital planning process. Once the design process is completed and prior to

submission of the funding application, an updated business case will be submitted taking account of the actual projected build costs. The delivery programme and cost plan for the project are being developed through the Project Board, taking account of the financial envelope, current inflationary pressures on capital infrastructure and the agreed project vision.

### **5.3 Policy Implications**

5.3.1 There are no direct Policy implications.

### **5.4 Equality Implications**

5.4.1 A central theme of the project is to diversify the audience for archives and ensure a new service is built around the needs of its target audiences. As the project develops an Equality Impact Assessment will need to be carried out in order to ensure that the project does not inadvertently have a negative impact on particular groups or communities.

### **5.5 Human Resources Implications**

5.5.1 There are no direct Human Resources implications

### **5.6 Risk Management Implications**

5.6.1 The project manager maintains a detailed risk register and risks and issues are reported to the Project Board and Portfolio Holders on a regular basis. Risks are managed by the Project Board in consultation with officers in both Councils.

5.6.2 Inflationary pressures on all capital projects are significant and contingencies therefore need to be sufficient to address these. This will be subject to close scrutiny as the project progresses. Should such additional pressures become evident then they will need to be considered as part of each Council's capital planning processes.

5.6.3 A risk to the successful delivery of this project at this stage is that the timetable has slipped and is no longer in line with the Heritage Fund's original grant expiry date. The impact of Covid-19 in particular has required an updated community engagement plan, while elements of the programme have been subject to change in line with the availability of specialist consultants and project staff. The project team are in ongoing discussions with the Heritage Fund about this and are requesting an extension to the grant expiry date.

### **5.7 Rural Communities Implications**

5.7.1 There are no direct implications for rural communities.

### **5.8 Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children**

5.8.1 There are no direct implications for children and young people. Young people are a target audience for the project and are being consulted about potential activities as the project develops.

## **5.9 Public Health Implications**

5.9.1 Activities have been developed with the aim of supporting the health and wellbeing of residents within both boroughs. The learning from these pilots will inform future project and service delivery.

## **5.10 Climate Change Implications**

5.10.1 The project design team is working to minimise the carbon footprint of the project. Current modelling indicates that the centres will be very energy efficient, while activities which link people to the natural environment through archives are being explored, with the aim of encouraging people to think about how this has changed over time and the potential impact of climate change.

## **6 Ward Members Affected**

6.1 This report relates to Shared Services that operate across both CE and CWAC so all wards are affected in both Councils.

## **7 Access to Information**

Documents are available for inspection at:

Cheshire East Democratic Services, Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach  
CW11 1HZ

or:

Cheshire West & Chester Democratic Services, Civic Offices, Civic Way, Ellesmere  
Port, CH65 0BE

## **8 Contact Information**

8.1 Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

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