

# Cheshire East Council

# Cheshire West and Chester Council

## Shared Services Joint Committee

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**Date of Meeting:** 25 March 2022

**Report Title:** Archives Relocation Project: Development Phase Update

**Senior Officer:** Paul Newman, Archives and Local Studies Shared Service 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.

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.
- 4.3 The previous report (Shared Services Joint Committee, November 2021) noted that a formal review of the project was being held with the National Lottery Heritage Fund in December and that this was potentially a pass/fail point. This development phase review was passed successfully and the project is now in its next stage of development. This is an important milestone for the project and gives confidence that it is progressing in the right direction.
- 4.4 Feedback from the review was positive and are helping to shape the remaining work to be carried out during the development phase. The key points were
- The NLHF were impressed with the level of detailed background work and underlying research and consultation undertaken to develop the project so far.
  - Proposals for future volunteering and training will need to be developed in more detail.
  - Further consideration should be given to the approach to environmental sustainability and provision for nature, in terms of activities, interpretation and building design.
  - Detailed proposals for project governance should be presented when the delivery phase funding bid is submitted.
  - Future operating costs, once business planning is completed, will need to be fully understood and appropriate revenue contributions secured by the time the delivery phase funding bid is submitted (see also 5.2.1).

- 4.5 Formal notification of the successful review was received in January and work has continued to develop the project. RIBA Stage 3 (for both building design and interpretation design) has started and is timetabled to be completed in the Summer, with planning applications to follow in the Autumn. Further refinement of the project Activity Plan will continue. Once this work has been completed it will then be possible to finalise the business plan.
- 4.6 Currently, the delivery phase funding application is due to be submitted in August, with a decision due in December. If successful, the project team will need to work with NLHF to secure permission to start the project, a process which is estimated to take three months. The delivery of the project would therefore start in April 2023.
- 4.7 Progress reviews with NLHF continue to be held approximately every 3 months and provide an opportunity for the project team to seek guidance and feedback; these meetings help to mitigate any risks to the delivery phase application.

## **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 councils' capital programmes, subject to further approvals. The final scheme and future revenue implications would also require approval through existing governance arrangements if the delivery phase funding application is successful.
- 5.2.2 Each Council currently has match funding referenced in its capital programme pipeline, based on a NLHF contribution of £4.5 million. 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 approved capital budget, current inflationary pressures on capital infrastructure and the agreed project vision.

5.2.3 While final operating budgets can only be confirmed once the detailed design work is completed, it is anticipated that the new service model will result in changes to revenue requirements as a result of operating from two main sites and enhancing the wider programme of events and activities. These costs will be evaluated alongside the Stage 3 design work over spring/summer 2022 and will be included in an updated business case. Ongoing affordability will form part of the final delegated sign off consideration before the bid submission in August.

### **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 Board members on a regular basis. Risks are managed by the Project Board in consultation with officers in both Councils

5.6.2 Ongoing design development may lead to further cost pressures. Inflationary pressures on all capital projects are significant and contingencies therefore need to be sufficient to address these. This will be subject to scrutiny as the project progresses. Should such additional pressures become evident then they will need to be addressed as part of the Councils' capital review 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 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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