

## **Options Assessment: Re-Locating the Cheshire Archives and Local Studies (CALS) Service**

A number of options to relocate the CALS and continue to provide access to the collection whilst affording new and appropriate levels of accommodation and storage for the collection have been considered by Officers, and Members of the Shared Services Joint Committee. These are as follows:

1. 1 main base, with access and storage onsite, combined with satellite access points;
2. 2 main bases, with access and storage onsite, combined with a small number of satellite access points;
3. 1 main base, with access and a combination of onsite and offsite storage, with satellite access points;
4. 2 main bases, with access and a combination of onsite and offsite storage, with a small number of satellite access points;
5. All access to collections is virtual. Storage in on one site with no public access;
6. 1 main base with access, but no storage onsite. Series of satellite access points and 1 offsite store.

A summary of the key considerations taken into account is set out below. Options 3 and four have been identified as the preferred options to take forward . The recommendation is to undertake a more detailed options analysis of these two options to explore the risks, benefits and costs of each.

The other Options could potentially be pursued but are considered by officers to be overall less advantageous in this particular instance than the preferred Options identified above. The Joint Committee's decision to look more closely at options 3 and 4 is based on the following information.

### **Option 1**

#### **1 main base, with access and storage onsite, combined with satellite access points**

This Option would ensure that the whole archives collection is housed in one place, making it easy for users to access to the collections. The use of satellite access points will increase the potential to engage with new audiences and bring the collections closer to new and existing users, although there would be associated costs of managing this more remote service.

Financially, there will be no ongoing revenue costs for offsite storage, as the entire collection will be stored at and accessed from one main base and there may be the

potential to rent expansion space to other archives services. However, the capital costs are higher with establishing a new, user friendly access point and storage onsite when compared with a combination of onsite and offsite storage.

The access for users would be more convenient if the entire collection were to be housed on one base, and would reflect the way in which users of archives make use of archive collections: generally people do not know what it is they want or need to look at in advance of a visit and their use of the collections over the course of a visit is unpredictable. This option would also enhance volunteer activity, make processing of collections by staff more efficient and would facilitate digitisation and outreach activity with the collections.

This option would reduce risks to the collections by keeping them all in one place, allowing for their future growth and reducing handling to a minimum level as there would be no transporting of archives, as is required when some storage is off-site.

It is recommended that this is not a preferred Option owing to higher pressures on capital funding.

## **Option 2**

### **2 main bases, with access and storage onsite, combined with a small number of satellite access points.**

This Option would ensure ease of access to collections for users within each local authority area. The use of satellite access points will increase the potential to engage with new audiences and bring the collections closer to new and existing users, although there would be logistical costs of managing this more remote service. This option would also enhance volunteer activity and would facilitate digitisation and outreach activity with the collections.

This option would reduce risks to the collections allowing for their future growth and reducing handling to a minimum level as there would be no transporting of archives, as is required when some storage is off-site.

Finally there would be no ongoing revenue costs for offsite storage, as the entire collection would be stored at and accessed from the two main bases, and there may be the potential to rent expansion space to other archive services. However, this Option has high capital costs associated with establishing two new, user friendly access points alongside storage facilities in two different areas.

Another consideration with this Option is the division of the collection between two different locations, as this could be confusing for users to understand which collections are stored / accessed where. The logistics of setting up such a service delivery option would also be problematic, although achievable.

It is recommended that this is not the preferred Option, owing to the high capital and ongoing revenue costs associated with providing the service in two different locations,

### **Option 3**

#### **1 main base, with access and a combination of onsite and offsite storage, with satellite access points.**

Under this Option, one main base would be used for access to the collection, although a range of satellite access points could be used to engage with new audiences and bring the collections closer to new and existing users, although there would be associated costs of managing this more remote service.

Financially, there would be ongoing costs associated with some storage of the collection offsite however there would be lower capital costs associated with locating the new access point and some storage facility on one main base.

Access for users may be less convenient when compared with those Options which have entirely onsite storage, as the way in which users consult archives is generally unpredictable. This option will also be less efficient for staff when dealing with enquiries and working on digitisation and outreach programmes.

This option would potentially increase risks to the collections through the requirement to transport them to and from the main base for customers and staff/volunteer/outreach/digitisation activity. These risks can however be mitigated by careful selection of which records are held off-site and through correct specification of storage and retrieval services.

**It is recommended that this is a preferred Option to be considered for further investigation and feasibility study.**

### **Option 4**

#### **2 main bases, with access and a combination of onsite and offsite storage, with a small number of satellite access points.**

This Option would ensure ease of access to collections for users within each local authority area. The use of satellite access points will increase the potential to engage with new audiences and bring the collections closer to new and existing users, although there would be logistical costs of managing this more remote service. This option would also enhance volunteer activity.

Financially, there would be ongoing revenue costs associated with some storage of the collection offsite, and in maintaining costs associated with accommodating and

delivering the service in two different areas. This Option would also have high capital costs in establishing new access points and storage facilities in two different areas.

Access for users may be less convenient when compared with those Options which have entirely onsite storage, as the way in which users consult archives is generally unpredictable. This option will also be less efficient for staff when dealing with enquiries and working on digitisation and outreach programmes.

As with Option 2, another consideration with this Option is the division of the collection between two different locations, as this could be confusing for users to understand which collections are stored / accessed where. The logistics of setting up such a service delivery option would also be problematic, although achievable.

This option would potentially increase risks to the collections through the requirement to transport them to and from the main base for customers and staff/volunteer/outreach/digitisation activity. These risks can however be mitigated by careful selection of which records are held off-site and through correct specification of storage and retrieval services.

**It is recommended that this is a preferred Option to be considered for further investigation and feasibility study.**

## **Option 5**

**1 main base with access, but no storage onsite. Series of satellite access points and 1 offsite store.**

Under this Option, one main base would be used for access to the collection, although a series of satellite access points would be used to engage with new audiences and bring the collections closer to new and existing users. There would also be one main offsite storage base.

This Option would incur lower capital costs than some of the other Options considered here, as presumably a smaller main access building would be required due to there being no onsite storage, although there would be significant ongoing revenue costs for maintaining the offsite storage facility.

The main drawback with this Option is that lack of onsite storage would make the collections less accessible. The satellite access points would help to address this, although there would be associated costs with managing this more remote service. As these access points would all need to be suitable in terms of staff availability and security of the collections while on site, these costs are likely to be significant

This option would increase risks to the collections through the requirement to transport them to and from storage. These risks can to some extent be mitigated through correct specification of storage and retrieval services.

Although potentially lower capital costs associated with this service, it is considered that this should not be taken forward as a preferred Option, owing to the potential detrimental implications for access to the collection which would impair the ability of the service to meet its statutory requirements of providing ease of access to the collection.

## **Option 6**

**All access to collections is virtual. Storage would be on one main base with no public access.**

Over recent years, good progress has already been made in digitising part of the CALS collection. 7% of the collection is now available online (for comparison, the National Archives has 5% of its collection online) and under this Option, the entire collection would be digitised in order to provide solely digital access to the collection. This would allow existing and new users extensive to the collection. However, financially, this Option is not feasible owing to the significant capital costs associated with digitising the entire collection (which is upwards of 8 linear kilometres of documents of a huge variety of shapes, sizes and formats). This Option would also take a significant amount of time (potentially years) to digitise the whole collection and the ongoing costs of managing and providing access to digitised images are considerable. The digitisation of archives would not stop at any point in the next few decades as the collections continue to grow: therefore digitisation would need to be continuous and in order to provide access and aid transparency would need to happen quickly.

Although there would be no capital costs associated with establishing a new user friendly access point, there would of course also continue to be significant revenue costs associated with storage of the original archives documents.

A further consideration is that part of the experience of using archives, whether for research or for outreach/learning activities, is that the experience of touching 'the original' is important for many people.

It is recommended that this is not a preferred Option and although the service will continue to digitise as much of its collection as possible, to digitise the entire collection would not only incur significant financial costs, but it would also take a significant amount of time to do so, potentially negatively impacting on service provision and ability to meet statutory access requirements.