

Cambridgeshire Archives Service

To: Community, Social Mobility and Inclusion

Meeting Date: 21 July 2022

From: Alan Akeroyd, Archives Manager

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Outcome: The Committee is asked to consider the direction of the County Archives Service and to note that the service has applied for Accredited Archive status from the National Archives.

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

- a) Note the scope and reach of the Archives Service since its move from Shire Hall to the new archive centre in Ely over 2019-2020; and
- b) Endorse the current application for Accredited Archive status.

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1. Background

- 1.1 This report is presented to provide the Committee with an update on the Archives Service since the move of the documents out of Shire Hall and into new accommodation at Ely in 2019. Committee is also advised on progress with the service's application to the National Archives for Accredited Archive status.

2. Main Issues

- 2.1 This report:

- Describes the scope and reach of the Archives Service;
- Profiles the users we serve; and
- Outlines current and likely future (post-COVID) user trends.

- 2.2 County-level provision of archive services is statutorily underpinned by the Public Records Acts of 1958 and 1967, the Local Government Act 1972, the Law of Property Act 1972, the Tithe Act 1936, and other statutory measures. In Cambridgeshire, the Archives Service has been collecting historical records since the 1930s. Our [collections development policy](#) is strict and we accept only those records which we believe to be worth permanent preservation. Currently we hold 700 cubic metres of records, dating from the early 13th century to the present day.

- 2.3 The service is inspected by The National Archives (TNA). Following one such inspection in 2012, TNA gave a deadline to the Council to acquire new archives accommodation for the records then stored in poor conditions in the basement of Shire Hall. Failure to provide such accommodation would have resulted in TNA withdrawing the Council's licence to hold public records, which would have made Cambridgeshire the first such authority ever to lose its records licence. A search for suitable new archives accommodation was carried out and the former Strikes bowling alley building in Ely was acquired. This building was converted to an archives centre, on schedule and within the final approved budget, and was formally opened in February 2020.

2.4 Cambridgeshire Archives, Ely

The Ely archives centre contains 11 linear km of archive storage in environmentally-controlled conditions. At current accessioning rates, the building has enough storage for circa thirty years of accrual. The building includes a 100 m² public searchroom, a digitisation studio, a document conservation studio, and a cataloguing room. The centre is shared with Registration service colleagues; Registration's registers of births, marriages and deaths are kept in a dedicated part of the archive store, and the searchroom is also used for weddings and other ceremonies.

2.5 Huntingdonshire Archives, Huntingdon

The service provides another public access point at Huntingdon. Huntingdonshire was a separate county council 1889-1974 and had set up its own record office in the 1940s. When

the counties were united in 1974 it was decided to keep the Huntingdonshire Archives in Huntingdon. The records are held in a purpose-built environmentally-controlled store in Huntingdon Library, built in 2009; the store contains about 1 linear km of shelving. The store is almost full, and Huntingdonshire records which are only very rarely consulted are held at Ely.

2.6 Staffing and budget

2.6.1 The service operates as a single team across the two access points at Ely and Huntingdon. The service comprises: a public services archivist and five archive assistants who deliver the public service side (searchrooms, exhibitions, outreach events, website, social media, historical research service); a collections archivist and cataloguing archivist who manage the document side (accessioning, cataloguing, depositor negotiations, database, digital preservation, store control); a conservator who repairs, conserves and packages documents; a digitisation officer who creates high quality digital images; and an archives manager who leads on strategy, manages the budget and serves as TNA's formal point of contact over any service or public records issues.

2.6.2 The total revenue budget for the Archives service for 2022-23 is £0.38K. The County Council provides £0.36K, which covers staff salaries and on-costs.

2.6.3 The Archives service has a total income target (including research orders, reprographic fees, donations etc) of £15,078. Nearly all of the service's non-salary service expenditure, including archive packaging materials, display materials and the catalogue database, is funded by this income.

2.6.4 Facilities management colleagues inform us that the annual Planned Preventative Maintenance (PPM) budget for the archives centre at Ely is currently approximately £30k. This figure does not include unplanned repairs.

2.7 Users and stakeholders

2.7.1 The core collection is the archive of Cambridgeshire County Council and its predecessor authorities, which we hold in order to assist with the better governance of the County. Members and officers of the Council consult these records, in particular Council and committee minutes or historic departmental files.

2.7.2 Recent institutional or official users to consult our records include:

- The ongoing independent statutory inquiry into the NHS infected blood scandal of the 1970s and 1980s, which started its investigations in 2019. The inquiry's investigative team is looking at many archive records as part of its work, and because the inquiry's team needed to consult Cambridgeshire's records during our pre-move closure period we made special arrangements for them to access relevant records at our former outstore. We are continuing to provide the inquiry with assistance over copies of NHS documents held by us.
- The ongoing independent statutory inquiry into child sexual abuse (IICSA), which prompted us to begin surveying, appraising and cataloguing records relating to children in care. The work generated over 2,400 catalogue entries, improved

intellectual control over these important collections and ensured the Council's continued compliance with the inquiry. One researcher from IICSA has visited us to consult some of these records.

- Littleport and Downham Internal Drainage Board, for whom we provided urgent out-of-hours access in October 2021 to 17th century fen drainage records due to their concerns over river dredging activities.

2.7.3 In addition to officers consulting our records for administrative or governmental reasons we also welcome members of the public carrying out research into genealogy or local history. Roughly 50% of in-person visitors are Cambridgeshire residents. However, trends are changing (see 2.9 below).

2.7.4 The service was instrumental in setting up the Cambridgeshire Community Archives Network (CCAN), which we continue to support. CCAN is a collection of thirty predominantly village-based groups who digitise photographs and records which are still held by local residents (rather than by us) and who make the images available online.

2.7.5 Our main users and stakeholders are represented on the County Advisory Group for Archives and Local Studies (CAGALS). The County Council appoints three elected Members to sit on the group. CAGALS also includes representatives of record-creating bodies, education and research institutions, searcher and user groups (family and local history societies), CCAN and other interested organisations. The group is a vital way for our user groups to vocalise concerns or issues, and it acts as a forum for these groups to interact with each other. All major service proposals are communicated to our stakeholders via CAGALS for open discussion and challenge.

2.8 Application for Accredited Archive status

The Committee is asked to note that the service has applied to TNA for Accredited Archive status. This status is a badge of external recognition which publicly demonstrates the quality of an archives service. The inspection by TNA covers not just the physical environment of the service (store, searchroom, conservation facilities etc) but also wider aspects such as outreach, engagement with communities, online presence, catalogue quality, the preservation of digital records and business continuity planning. Accreditation encourages the development of robust service policies and procedures and it drives continual service improvement. We have never applied to TNA for Accredited Archive status before, and a successful application would be a national seal of approval on the Council's investment in the archives centre at Ely. TNA visited the Archive at Ely on 8 June and were positive in their comments. We await the formal outcome of their visit later this summer.

2.9 Trends

2.9.1 Prior to the move of Cambridgeshire Archives to Ely, the service was receiving an average of around 2,500 in-house searchers each year and was producing an average of 6,800 documents. We had hoped these figures would increase after the move, but the first national Covid-19 lockdown was imposed within weeks of the Ely centre's launch. The emergence from lockdown restrictions has revealed a new and different user landscape. In-house searchers are now more likely to be officers consulting records for administrative,

business or legal reasons, while the number of family historians visiting our searchrooms has greatly declined. We expect the number of in-house searchers this year to be 1,000 and the number of document productions to be 4,200. Similarly, our pool of volunteers has reduced - prior to 2020 our pool comprised a dozen individuals of all ages, but currently the pool is six and is comprised almost entirely of individuals of working age.

- 2.9.2 There has been a visible shift to remote use of records, e.g requests for digital copies or requests for staff to carry out research. We levy charges for all such remote use and it is worth noting that our income target was greatly exceeded in the most recent financial year (2021-22). The anticipated income for research orders was £7,500. In reality, service income was £14,446, as searchers opted to pay for staff to carry out research rather than visit us in person.
- 2.9.3 It remains to be seen whether some in-house searchers will start to drift back as Covid-19 recedes. Nevertheless, it is the service's opinion that a permanent shift in the user landscape has occurred, and that we will need to become more digitally focussed. To this end, the service is currently in discussion with a major genealogical website to provide copies of our parish register, entries of births, marriages and deaths from 1538 onwards. At present searchers need to contact us directly for copies. However, if images were made available online then many more users would see them and purchase copies, and we would see royalty income that would exceed the amount currently generated by individual purchases.

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

3.1 Environment and Sustainability

The records the service has relating to land ownership, in particular 19th century enclosure and tithe maps and the records of Fenland land drainage from the 17th century onwards, are used to inform research into Cambridgeshire's historic environment.

3.2 Health and Care

The records we have relating to Social Care, Children's Homes, hospitals and health trusts are used to inform research in those areas (see para 2.7.2 above for an example).

The service offers volunteering opportunities in transcribing, indexing, digitisation and conservation, thereby directly helping individuals to learn new skills and tackle isolation.

3.3 Places and Communities

Our archives actively contribute to the well-being of many different communities and localities, through CCAN groups, local and family history societies, civic societies, and others.

Users and stakeholders are inspired to deposit records of their own, giving them sense of pride in the knowledge that they are contributing towards many years of future research.

3.4 Children and Young People

The records we have relating to schools and Children's Homes are used to inform research in those areas.

Our archives are used as part of hands-on sessions for school children, for example our recent National Lottery-funded *Great History Chase* project which focussed on introducing primary aged schoolchildren to historical documents.

3.5 Transport

The records we have relating to vehicle registration, highways, rights of way, bridges, footpaths and land ownership are used to inform research in those areas.

4. Background Documents

4.1 [Cambridgeshire Archives Service: Collections Development Policy](#)