

To: Communities Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee

By: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Community Services and
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Directorate

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Subject: Archives and Local History Service

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary

Following public consultation on the vision for the Archives and Local History Service, and the start on site of the build of the new Kent History and Library Centre, this report updates Communities Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee members on progress with the planning for Service transformation.

FOR INFORMATION AND COMMENT

1. Context

1.1. In autumn 2008, we initiated a programme of consultation to inform the development of a new direction for the transformation of the Archives and Local History Service. That public consultation programme ran into the Spring of 2009 since when we have been progressing our thinking on the future shape of the Service. Following advice from Communities SMT, we delayed moving on to the next public facing step till planning for the new History and Library Centre (HLC) was complete, and we had certainty that it would be built. Now that the build of the HLC is underway we need to progress our planning so that the transformation of the Service can be complete before the opening of the HLC in 2012.

1.2. This report seeks to brief Communities Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee members on a number of critical elements for the future Archives and Local History Service:

- The build of the History and Library Centre in Maidstone.
- The vision for the service.
- The IT developments needed to underpin the service.
- The network of delivery points for the service.
- The staff structure needed to deliver the service.
- The future relationships with depositors.

2. Update on the build of the HLC

- 2.1.** Building work on the new Kent History and Library Centre has begun. Bouygues Development and KCC are working with a number of partners including Housing 21 and West Kent Housing Association to create a landmark new building in the heart of Maidstone. The Centre will bring the County's archive collection and library services from Maidstone St. Faith Street and County Central Library together under one roof making it easier for the public to access Kent's rich culture and heritage.
- 2.2.** The site at James Whatman Way has been cleared, piling is complete and work has begun on the foundations to the new centre. The building itself should begin to take shape from the late summer 2010 and is due for completion in summer 2012. Consultation, outreach and promotional work is underway, and excitement is beginning to grow as the local community begin to understand what the Centre has on offer for them.
- 2.3.** In the meantime, staff from across Libraries and Archives are working to ensure that we deliver a 21st century service that matches the quality of this flagship Centre. Recent staff workshops have discussed fit out, working practices and ethos.

3. The Vision for the Service

- 3.1.** Our vision for the Service was expressed in our public consultation document "Understanding Our Past, Changing Our Future". This can be viewed at http://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure_and_culture/archives_and_local_history/news_from_the_archives_section.aspx.
- 3.2.** The analysis of the feedback from the consultation overwhelmingly endorsed the vision outlined in our consultation document. (See appendix 1 for more detail of the consultation process and findings.) The feedback underlined how enthusiastic most people are to engage better with their history. At the same time respondents generally emphasised that the collections themselves and staff who help people to access them are the key resources to enable us to achieve this vision. Many people and groups wanted more information about, and access to, the material in the collections and many groups were interested in working in partnership with the service to provide this access locally. The idea of a community history network with the Archive and Local History Service at the hub, supporting local groups, was a recurring theme.
- 3.3.** In this light we feel that the vision expressed in our consultation document "Understanding Our Past, Changing Our Future" stands.
- 3.4.** In summary this vision is to exploit the potential in our collections to

support stronger and safer communities; learning for everyone; improved health, care and wellbeing; and quality of life. This will be achieved by:

- Caring better for our collections in much improved accommodation and through an enhanced programme of preservation and conservation at the new History and Library Centre for Kent.
- Improving access for all, both at the Centre and through the whole Library and Archive network and beyond, to deliver seamless access to materials that support the study of local people and communities, and increase community cohesion (see section 5 below).
- Exploiting the opportunities created by developments in ICT to enhance the experience and widen access (see section 4 below).
- Redefining staff and volunteer roles (see section 6 below), and training and equipping both groups to support both the universal service, and more targeted work to introduce our collections to those who can benefit most from this contact.
- Working with community partners to help them preserve and provide access locally to their historical archive collections.
- Developing existing relationships with schools and other education and training organisations to fully exploit the potential for our local history collections to support learning for all.
- Developing new partnerships with donors and depositors to make this work sustainable.

4. The IT developments needed to underpin the Service

We are progressing plans to ensure that IT developments will underpin the vision for the service:

4.1. Explore the Archives - documents, pictures and images from the collections available online and to download, and diaries and journals published as eBooks. For example these could include the diaries of Sir Joseph Banks (Cook's voyages to Australia) and Eva Knatchbull (12 year old in the 1870s) and the letters of Jane Austen. This content would be made more accessible through an enhanced interactive online catalogue to allow people to find material in our collections, and using wiki technology to add any information they have to our catalogues.

4.2. An enhanced website – to include:

- Who Do You Think You Are - a trace your ancestors interactive step by step online guide to researching your family history featuring famous Kent celebrities.
- General interest/learning packages, for example: "Walk the Pilgrims Way to Canterbury in 1380"; "Bomb Alley - Kent in the Second World War"; "Build a ship to fight the Armada in Sandwich"; "Learn to write like King Withred of Kent"; "How did it feel to be a Sikh

arriving in Gravesend in 1950"; and other games, quizzes, podcasts and blogs.

- Find out more about the history of your local community featuring different areas in Kent with links to relevant material in our collections and in the collections of partners in the local history community groups.
- Online research, advice and consultation services.

4.3. Kent Community History Network - a facility for local people who want to promote and look after the history of their local community together. This will include advice and support on collecting and looking after old material. It will enable different community groups across Kent to share information and images with links to relevant websites and to other like-minded groups in Kent through forums and twitter links. See www.mybrightonandhove.org.uk for an example of the type of network we would like to establish for Kent.

4.4. An improved Archive Management System - to support the cataloguing, storage and retrieval of our collections.

4.5. Born digital material - a system to store County Council records which are only produced in electronic format and which will eventually need to be added to the County Council's historic archive eg minutes, reports etc. This would link to KCC's e-agenda and achieve smarter, more efficient working and free up physical and virtual space.

5. The Network of Delivery Points needed to deliver the Service

5.1. The new History and Library Centre for Kent is being developed to provide the best standards of collection care and visitor experience that our archives deserve.

5.2. It has always been our intention to make this the new focus for the Archive Service, supported through virtual access and by enhancing the local history collections held in local libraries across the County.

5.3. It is our intention to expand the role of the existing 12 librarians based across the County to work with local people (staff, volunteers and public) to develop these local history collections through the addition of material including facsimiles of documents held in the archives.

5.4. East Kent Archive Centre (EKAC)

5.4.1. EKAC was originally developed as a temporary overflow as we ran out of storage space at the Centre for Kentish Studies. At the time it was envisaged that EKAC would only be needed for a short period but unfortunately it has taken longer than anticipated to deliver the new History and Library Centre.

5.4.2. In late 2008 Mr Hill wrote to the Leaders of the East Kent districts to

make them aware of our proposal to transfer the collections held at EKAC to Maidstone when the HLC is completed. Following those letters, Library and Archive Service managers met with officers from these districts to start discussions about the proposed transfer. We now intend to make contact again to progress these conversations to a conclusion.

5.5. Canterbury Cathedral Archive (CCA)

- 5.5.1.** KCC currently runs the CCA in partnership with Canterbury Cathedral, Canterbury Diocese, and Canterbury City Council. A large percentage of the collections held there are owned by our three partners.
- 5.5.2.** The delivery of the HLC gives us an opportunity to review this partnership in the light of the creation of a flagship Archive Centre in Maidstone, and the opportunities opening up for remote access to collections through developments in technology.
- 5.5.3.** We recognise that this will probably mean we need to develop a new relationship with our partners at CCA.
- 5.5.4.** Whatever shape this new partnership takes, we will want to maintain good relationships with the Cathedral Archives so that the established links between the two historic archive collections can be maintained and exploited.
- 5.5.5.** We plan to progress our conversations with our partners at CCA over the summer. We need to agree KCC's future involvement at CCA to enable us to factor this in to the planning for the HLC.

6. The Staff Structure needed to deliver the Service

- 6.1.** In order to deliver the service described in the vision we will need to redefine staff and volunteer roles, and train and equip both groups to enable them to fully exploit the collections in the way we want.
- 6.2.** Through this staffing review we also want to integrate the Library, Archive and Local History Services better, delivering more seamless services to the public and fully exploiting the opportunities to deliver efficiencies in the front of house and support teams.
- 6.3.** We also propose to integrate KCC's remaining museums development function into the new Archive and Local History Service. This will enable us to fully exploit the opportunities that exist for joint working across local heritage collections, and to ensure effective signposting of customers between us. We already have good examples of joint working with Maidstone Museum, and have mutually agreed to expand the range and scale of co-operative working in the future.
- 6.4.** We have already identified a revenue saving of £200k pa through the

move to the new building, in part from joining up the front of house teams and their management. This £200k has been allocated to support Prudential borrowing to help secure the new build.

- 6.5. We now propose to develop this structure further exploring all possibilities to deliver further efficiencies, drawing up draft job descriptions and person specifications, and starting consultation with staff as appropriate.

7. The Future Relationships with Depositors

- 7.1. Our collections fall into two broad categories: those which KCC own because they have been gifted to us or we have purchased them; and those which we hold on deposit for other organisations or individuals. Nearly all depositors do not pay any contribution to KCC for the collections they place on deposit with us. We have accepted this material in the past because we wish to enhance the collections we make available to the public.
- 7.2. When deposited with us, material has generally not been sorted or listed. Some of the material we receive is unsuitable for deposit with us because it does not add to our existing collections or cannot be made accessible to the public. This means that we need to invest significant resources to sort and assess the material before we are able to identify which items we might wish to return to the depositors. In the past, some approaches to return items to depositors have met with negative responses as such action creates financial/storage pressures for our depositors.
- 7.3. Assuming that we do wish to retain items from these collections, we then need to repackage, catalogue and in some cases conserve these collections. However, these collections remain in the ownership of the depositor and can be withdrawn at any time, in some cases for private sale.
- 7.4. We now propose to bring our relationships with depositors to a more sustainable footing and intend to hold meetings with existing depositors over the summer months to agree this change in policy.
 - 7.4.1. We will draw up a new collections policy which will state that we will only hold material that we feel add to the collections and that can be accessed by our customers. While we have spare storage capacity, we may consider offering to house other collections on a charged for basis to deliver income to the Service.
 - 7.4.2. With effect from the opening of the HLC we will only take on deposit new collections that meet this more robust test. This will mean that depositors will need to invest more time in sorting and listing their own collections before they offer them to us so that we can make the assessment before we take receipt and decide which parts of the

collections we wish to take responsibility for.

- 7.4.3. We will approach the owners of the collections already on deposit with us to plan how and when a similar retrospective exercise can be undertaken on this material. This will require them to invest some time in assisting the sorting and appraisal process. These approaches will be programmed for mutual convenience as far as possible. There will be a clear expectation that for us to continue to hold on deposit any part of their collections, we will require their co-operation in this process.
- 7.4.4. We will also expect depositors to sign up to a revised service level agreement which will clarify what contribution will be expected of them if they withdraw collections that we have invested resources in, for example in programmes of conservation. The agreement will also set out how we can exploit the merchandising potential of their collections, and who will benefit from any income derived.
- 7.5. In these ways we intend to progressively rationalise the collections we hold which will both enable us to exploit better the remaining collections for the public benefit and extend the life of the current storage facility by slowing down the rate at which the collection expands.
8. **Recommendations:** Communities Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members are asked:
 - 8.1. To note the progress towards the delivery of the History and Library Centre, and the developing plans for transformation of Archive and Local History services.
 - 8.2. To comment on the vision for the service and plans to deliver this vision.

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Consultation Feedback Analysis

type	number of responses
comment cards	49
emails/Letters	14
children's vision	118
non-user questionnaires	160
meetings	52
quiz responses	131

Comment Cards

Do you agree that it benefits people and their communities to find out about the past by using Kent Archives and Local History Service?

Yes: 100% No: 0%

Do you believe that the approach described in "Understanding Our Past, Changing Our Future" would help more people to find out about the past?

Yes: 90% No: 10%

Questionnaire for Non-Users

History is important:	% of positive responses
to bring families & communities together	76%
to inspire learning	75%
to add to the enjoyment of life	67%
to keep our minds active	67%

Are you interested in doing any of the following?

Finding out about Kent's history	64%
Finding out about the history of your house	34%
Finding out about the history of your family	69%
Finding out about the history of your local area	69%
Taking part in activities & events inspired by history	45%

Would you like to find out more about history?

at a community centre	17%
at your local library	81%
at a history or archive centre	58%
using the internet	66%

“Rewind Fast Forward” - Children’s Comment Card

I think we can make our history come alive by...

Sharing stories from the past about the people and places around us	53%
Showing the treasures from the collections in history centres to more people	61%
Finding and collecting things to keep for the future	50%
Telling stories from the past that are enjoyable, exciting or even horrible!	63%

What would make you more interested in history?

Learning more about the history of your family	55%
Learning more about the history of your local area	42%
Taking part in special events at your local history centre	47%
Using computers to explore history	53%

Selection of Comments Received

1. "History is the glue which holds communities together ..."
Sittingbourne Heritage Research Group
2. "Now people from the council estate are starting to come in too originally I think they were a bit reluctant and would just come in and hover thinking they had nothing to offer. It [the heritage centre] gives people a sense of pride and belonging in their community and local area."
Marden Heritage Group
3. "After talks we've given here and elsewhere in Birchington people often say 'I'll never look at my village in the same way again' – I think what we do is vital in helping people learn about their community and have more pride in it."
Birchington Heritage Trust
4. "As a society we all learn together about the local area and its history – there's a real community spirit within this society."
Sandgate Society
5. "People tend to want to leave all the research to people who've got degrees but we get everyone involved so they can learn in the process – many of them get real confidence, pride and a sense of achievement from finding out something using historical sources."
Historical Research Group for Sittingbourne
6. "There is a real learning role that archives can and do provide, interpreting material for students and making it of relevance to them."
Greenwich University
7. "As I love acting I thought if there were productions of history for all ages then it could be more interesting, both for the people watching and taking part in the play and the children performing it having to learn the lines off by heart."
Brownie - Age 10 Broadstairs
8. "Get someone you're learning about, so get someone to come dressed as the famous person from the past and get everyone to ask him questions so they learn more."
Child - Age 10
9. "The university holds courses at the Cathedral Archives and Library and it is important to teach from original materials."
University lecturer
10. "People, especially older people, come to the Friday session to talk about the past and we record the memories. But they get a cup of tea and get to

talk to other people and feel that they are contributing to the life of the village. It helps with their self esteem and also helps them not to feel so alone and isolated.”

Smerden Local History Group

11. “We have a new volunteer who lost his job and is so enthusiastic to be helping us and finding life is not so empty and boring after all he’s doing really well and much more happy and confident. He has learnt new skills which will help him in the future.”

Volunteer – Marden Heritage Group

12. “I also worked with a mother and toddler group in Seasalter as part of a Sure Start project ..using personal history to try and raise expectations and identify the aspirations of the mums, one of whom couldn’t read. We also used local history to give a focus for the group”

Greenwich University – community history

13. “When I was at school history was such a dull and uninspiring subject. KCC projects are bringing it all to life and encouraging more people to research.”

Comment Card

14. “I get a real sense of satisfaction from researching and finding out something new about the past. I always know when I come to EKAC it’s full of gems just waiting to be found. I always know I’m going to find one and sometimes I find bagfuls! And it’s great to then take them back to my community to show them, the very people who it is most relevant to.....”

EKAC Customer Focus Group

15. “I think what you’re doing is great – you need to engage people about their local history in an upfront way.”

Fremlins Walk Consultation

16. “I’m paid for 12 hours but I’m doing much more because it’s so interesting and you get hooked – I thought I would probably be volunteering somewhere else so I might as well volunteer here! I have learnt so much about the local area and also about what I can do! Amazing really as I’ve lived in the area for most of my life ...”

Godmersham Park Heritage Centre

17. “I have completed a course on Kentish History and used CKS – it was great, so much info and so interesting and was always getting sidetracked!”

Comment Card

18. “If you want people to come to the new history centre you’d have to have a party every week! You could have a party where everyone could dress up in olden day clothes that would be cool but it might be a bit embarrassing. Yeah I’d like to dress up with my friends in the new History Centre. Could you do it so that then you could send a picture of your

friends dressed up with Bluetooth? That would be good and it would get people interested in history!"

Group of 13-14 yr olds – Maidstone HOUSE

19. "You could have a fair/parade in the summer. It's all free display things in it. Act out scenes from the past and get children involved in it more."

Child - Age 11

20. "It was a great session! I really enjoyed looking through all the old documents and trying to read the handwriting. I really want to come back and learn more about my family history."

Invicta School Group

21. "You should have the confidence to let children get to grips with original documents – they love it!"

Primary School Teacher

22. "I've read with interest your consultation document. I'm delighted with the new emphasis on engaging young people with real records, and also using those records not only to teach history but also to inspire other activities such as music."

Comment Card

23. "Access needs to be welcoming, interactive and attractive to a range of ages .."

Schools History Advisor

24. "The key things are accessibility and availability."

East Kent Archive Centre - Customer Focus Group

25. "It is clear that the basic function of the Kent Archives Service has always been, and should continue to be, the preservation of the historic documents of the ancient county of Kent."

Local Historian

26. "We are struggling with organising our collections, especially on the IT side – whether to use Word or Excel. Some help and advice in that area would be great. Also something like a template we could use for arranging and organising our collections ..what fields for cataloguing and indexing."

Loose History Society

27. "CKS is very difficult to access for some people both in terms of travelling there and parking and also understanding how everything is arranged! It's very intimidatingwhat you need is someone there to welcome you....to put you at your ease when you first arrive."

Historical Research Group for Sittingbourne

28. "It is important to have good catalogues and cataloguing, and to tackle cataloguing backlogs, as otherwise material could not be available for consultation."

University Group

29. "Very important to have people and staff who know what they're doing and who can catalogue and interpret collections."

East Kent Archive Centre - Customer Focus Group

30. "You need people working [with you] who actually like children to get them engaged ..what about a young archivists club to go with the young archaeologists club?"