

To: Communities Policy Overview Committee -12 November 2008

By: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member, and Amanda Honey, Managing Director, Communities

Subject: Kent Archives and Local History Service

Classification: Unrestricted

FOR CONSULTATION

Summary: A consultation process to develop a new vision for the Archives service is getting underway. During this process it is planned to raise awareness of the potential contribution of this Service to Kent County Council's objectives, to agree a vision for the future shape of the service and then to work with stakeholders to develop a strategy to deliver it.

Recommendation: Members are asked to consider the attached Archives Service consultation document and give comments and suggestions on (i) the content of the document, and (ii) the channels the service should use to ensure widest possible engagement in the consultation process.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Archives and Local History Service has huge and partly untapped potential to deliver significant benefits to the people of Kent; to help us all to "understand our past and change our future"; and to support many of Kent County Council's Towards 2010 targets - in particular those relating to Learning for Everyone; Enjoying Life; Improved health, care and wellbeing; and Stronger and Safer Communities.

1.2 In order to realise this potential we have begun a consultation process to achieve transformational change for the Service. This programme will deliver the vision, the strategy, and the staff skills and capacity to achieve it and will enable us to maximise the benefit and opportunity that will arise from the planned new History Centre.

2. Developing a Vision

2.1 We have produced a consultation document called "*Understanding Our Past, Changing Our Future: Developing a New Vision for Kent Archives and Local History Service*". It presents a picture of the Archives and Local History Service, of which many may be unaware, and gives evidence of the ways that this Service can contribute to KCC objectives. It makes the case to improve and widen access to archives and presents suggestions on how this might be achieved.

2.2 We have initiated a consultation process, using this publication to begin conversations with stakeholders and this Policy Overview Committee

has an important contribution to make at this early stage of framing new direction. Discussions will then be held with external stakeholders including existing and potential future customers of the service; the District Councils; , local history groups across Kent; the National Archives and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.

2.3 The consultation document has already been shared with Library and Archives staff and they will be very much involved in the process.

3. Key elements of the process

3.1 It will be very important that we engage fully with a number of influential users including high profile academics in the three Kent universities. We also need to work closely with private individuals and organisations who have deposited records with us.

3.2 We will also need to work closely with all our existing users to ensure that the proposed widening of access to new audiences, and the increased use of historic material in the collections to help with learning and community cohesion, impacts positively and augments the public services we offer.

3.3 Through these existing relationships we will need to manage expectations of the Service during the transition, and especially during the transfer of services to the planned new History Centre. We anticipate that some parts of the agreed vision could be implemented prior to this transfer, but others would only be made possible when the new Centre delivers improved public access, more effective staffing options, better educational facilities and higher quality archive storage and conservation capacity.

3.4 Our vision to widen access includes the provision of internet access to digitised records and the availability of facsimile documents that will not require the levels of security and environmental control needed for much of our original documentation. We also plan to exploit the significant expertise already existing within the Library Service in reaching out to disadvantaged communities, and providing the best possible access to people of all abilities.

3.5 The core message in all our briefings and communications will be that our overall objective for the service is to become much more accessible and aligned with KCC objectives. The development of the new History Centre will support these aims and allow the management and care of the collections to be greatly improved.

4. Resource Implications

4.1 It is intended that the transformed service will be delivered within existing revenue budgets.

5. Conclusion

5.1 In initiating this consultation on the future vision it is our intention to raise awareness of the significant contribution that the Archives and Local History Service can make to the lives of the people of Kent, as well as to support Kent County Council's own objectives. We are also seeking to ensure that the vision adopted, following the consultation period, has wide support and enables us to develop detailed plans to fully exploit the resources available to us. These resources include the fabulous historic collections in our care, the skilled and enthusiastic staff who help people access these collections, and the new investment Kent County Council is planning to make to build a state of the art History Centre in Maidstone.

6. Recommendation

Members are asked to consider the attached Archives Service consultation document and make comments and suggestions on

- (i) the content of the document, and
- (ii) the channels the service should use to ensure widest possible engagement in the consultation process.

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