

Select Committee on Regeneration, Culture and Adult Education

Report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services

Archives Update Report

Purpose of Report

1. To update the Select Committee on the short term and long term situation for the Archives Service.
2. To inform the Select Committee of the outcome of the recent pilot assessment of the Archives Service.

Background

General

3. The management of the storage conditions for the Archives Services at Mount Pleasant is of key importance for the Directorate.
4. The service has been managed by a Borough Archivist on a part time basis from the July 2006 to December 2006 due to the decision of the incumbent that he wished to leave but was prepared to remain in post on a part time basis until the post was filled.
5. A new full-time Borough Archivist started in post on 18th December 2006 and will up-date our plans for the effective management of the archival records in the short- and long-term.
6. The service had a backlog of work relating to Accessioning (putting records onto the catalogue and giving items a running unique identification number). Some items were being stored in inappropriate packaging.
7. In November 2005 the decision was made to close the service an extra day a week to enable staff to Accession all items to a level that would bring it up to basic record office standard. This first stage of recording the items held is now nearly complete. The time will then be used to improve the detail of cataloguing to make the records more accessible.
8. Committee Services have also been reviewing the holdings of their records at Archives to ensure that they are appropriate and do not duplicate records held elsewhere.
9. The Borough Archivist will identify which other departments need to review their records to ensure that only appropriate records are held.

Physical conditions of the Archives

10. As part of our proactive approach to managing the service, we have been working to counter the effects of a large outbreak of mould in the main storeroom consequent to the very hot summer 2006 which caused the temperature and humidity to fluctuate more than in the past. Some records were affected by this warmer period but they have now been restored by an external company and returned to the Archive Service.
11. The following actions have also been undertaken to improve the management of the materials:
 - Additional portable dehumidifiers have been purchased and are being used in the main store when the Archive service is open.
 - Portable fans have been purchased and are being used in the main store when the Archive service is open.
 - Where the mould has mainly occurred on the bottom shelves, material has been moved from here, and boxed to increase protection.
 - Additional shelving has been purchased to put into the remaining spare room and some material has been moved there.
 - The rolling stack is left open at different points each night on a rolling programme to increase the flow of air around the archives.
 - The archives are inspected regularly and any items showing signs of mould are removed, boxed and put into isolation until they can be treated.
 - A machine has been purchased which will assist the staff in managing low levels of mould.
12. Further necessary building maintenance will be done to reduce the temperature and humidity range in the building which will also contribute to improving the storage conditions.
13. Discussions have been held regarding the removal of the Archaeological artefacts to a more appropriate store at the museum service to release space and prevent additional mould problems.

Inspection and Pilot Assessment

14. Arrangements for inspection have changed during 2006. The Archives Service Licence was due for review by The National Archive who report to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. However, they have introduced a new self-assessment system which will enable Archives Services to benchmark their provision nationally. As part of the up-dating of its plans, the Service will need to review its activities in the light of these revised criteria for assessment.
15. The Service was requested to complete a pilot survey on provision in the summer of 2006.
16. In December 2006 Dudley Archives were given a One Star rating within a scale of One to Four Stars with Four being the top of the scale. The table below shows how Dudley Archives compares with those services which completed the survey:

	Score for your service	Average score in West Midlands	Average score of metropolitan district services	Average score in the UK
Section 1: governance	65.0%	57.5%	46.0%	52.5%
Section 2: documentation of collections	60.5%	52.5%	44.0%	53.0%
Section 3: customer responsiveness	60.0%	62.0%	58.0%	67.0%
Section 3b: search room and other public services	61.5%	55.5%	52.0%	59.5%
Section 4a: buildings, security & Environment	35.0%	48.0%	41.0%	49.0%
Section 4b: preservation and conservation	37.0%	48.0%	39.5%	49.5%
Overall score	53.5%	54.0%	46.5%	55.0%

Conclusion - Long term plans

17. Dudley Council is determined to ensure that we develop an archives and local history service fit for the 21st century.
18. Since the original decision to move the Archives was made, the standards that the Archive service is expected to meet have been more rigorously enforced by The National Archives. This is due to issues and concerns that have been raised nationally in relation to archives collections e.g. the loss of some collections in a fire at Norwich.
19. In order to ensure that the Council fulfils its duty of care for the records and the Archive Service, we need to ensure that the future plans meet the standards fully and provide value for money for the residents of Dudley.
20. We are currently reviewing options for the future as we want to develop an excellent service, which will serve Dudley well for decades to come. When we are in a position to share next steps and future plans we will do so, but that will not be until later in 2007.

Finance

21. In order to ensure that the existing archive store remains water tight and provides environmental conditions required for the storage of fragile documents whilst a new archive is developed, it is necessary to undertake limited building maintenance work to the Mount Pleasant building. This will include minor roofing repairs to keep the rain out together with mechanical and electrical works to ensure that temperature and humidity is controlled so that documents are protected from damage, and in particular, from mould attack. The works are

estimated to cost in the order of £50,000 and will be met from existing maintenance budgets.

Law

22. *'Public records, as defined by the Public Records Act 1958 and subsequent amendments to the schedules of such records attached to it, are subject to statutory controls and are placed under the supervision of the Keeper of Public Records (the Chief Executive of The National Archives), and the Lord Chancellor (the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs). (Taken from the Standard for Record Repositories)*
23. Dudley Archives is a place of deposit as defined by the Act which has to be approved by the Keeper.

Equality Impact

24. This report complies with the Council's policies on equal opportunities and diversity. The issues raised do not have a direct impact on children and young people.

Recommendation

25. It is recommended that:-
 - The Select Committee receives and notes the report as set out above
 - The Select Committee receives and notes the pilot assessment score for the Archive Service.



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List of Background Papers

The National Archives: Standard for Record Repositories

BS5454 Recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents