

## ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Culture, Lifestyle, Sport and Tourism</b>
2.	<b>Date:</b>	<b>8th February, 2011</b>
3.	<b>Title:</b>	<b>Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – Government Policy on Archives (All wards)</b>
4.	<b>Directorate:</b>	<b>Environment and Development Services</b>

### 5. Summary

In November 2009, The National Archives presented to Parliament a new government policy on archives entitled *Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. This policy addresses five key recommendations:-

- 1) 'Bigger, better and sustainable services
- 2) Leadership and workforce
- 3) Digital preservation
- 4) Online access
- 5) Cultural learning partnerships'<sup>1</sup>

This report outlines in further detail Rotherham Archives and Local Studies Service commitment to this new government policy.

### 6. Recommendations

**Cabinet member agrees to officers working towards the new government policy as detailed in this report.**

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<sup>1</sup> *Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, The National Archives

## 7. Proposals and Details

In November 2009, The National Archives presented to Parliament a new government policy on archives entitled *Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. This was followed several months later by an action plan called *Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in action*. The policy and plan contain five key recommendations:

- 1) Bigger, better and sustainable services
- 2) Leadership and workforce
- 3) Digital preservation
- 4) Online access
- 5) Cultural learning partnerships

In action provides guidance on what action can be taken at three levels including Chief Executives, Archive Managers and The National Archives/Museum, Libraries and Archives Council. A further action plan was also published in March 2010.

Outlined below is Rotherham's commitment to working towards and developing these recommendations and applies in equal measure to both Archives and Local Studies as a joint service. At the core of this commitment is to deliver excellent customer service.

### Recommendation 1 – Bigger, better and sustainable services

'Sometimes working together can create something that is better for everyone. Building partnerships to help create growth and opportunity can help make the most of your resources and connect with users about what's on offer.'<sup>2</sup>

Rotherham Archives and Local Studies will

- Increase co-operation across all four South Yorkshire Archives and Local Studies Services;
- Share service plans, examples of best practices and new initiatives;
- Continue to work in close partnership with other Rotherham Council cultural service providers, such as museums and libraries, as well as information management providers;
- Realign service priorities to meet local authority priorities and wider public policy focussing upon 'providing quality education for all, ensuring people have opportunities to improve skills, learn and get a job' and 'helping to create safe and healthy communities' and
- Participate in a forthcoming accreditation scheme and continue to monitor performance through a variety of mechanisms including the Survey of Visitors to UK Archives.

### Recommendation 2 – Leadership and workforce

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<sup>2</sup> *Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, The National Archives

'A modern archive service needs a diverse range of skills and people. We need to provide opportunities to help people to find the right roles for them, so they can flourish and improve the services our customers deserve.'<sup>3</sup>

Rotherham Archives and Local Studies will

- Encourage professional staff to actively engage with leadership and development training;
- Develop an internal annual training programme creating a culture of staff development;
- Undertake skills audits to identify strengths within the current workforce ensuring any gaps are addressed. This will also take into account new skills for the future;
- Implement the forthcoming volunteer policy and develop a volunteer programme directly linked to skills development and employability and
- Participate in any forthcoming initiatives such as Future Jobs Fund.

### Recommendation 3 – Digital preservation

'Knowing what to keep and how best to preserve it is a real skill. Preserving history calls for the right training, the right environment and the right technology. When people look back at your collections, will they be getting the full story?'<sup>4</sup>

Rotherham Archives and Local Studies will

- Develop a digital archives policy;
- Develop guidelines and training for staff in the handling and care of digital archives offered to Rotherham Archives and Local Studies Service;
- Undertake a survey of digital material already held;
- Invest in software and hardware and in corporate ICT solutions with initial scoping report and
- Work in partnership with the EDRMS Programme Manager, the Records Manager and with other individuals/organisations working in the field of digital preservation.

### Recommendation 4 – Online access

'Now is the time to invest in the technology and skills needed to make archives accessible to everyone.'<sup>5</sup>

Rotherham Archives and Local Studies will

- Continue to develop the potential of Calm (service's collections management database) and CalmView (public access module);
- Review and implement replacement system for ViewFinder (public access terminals to 18,000 images);

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<sup>3</sup> *Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, The National Archives

<sup>4</sup> *Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, The National Archives

<sup>5</sup> *Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, The National Archives

- Create a retroconversion (conversion of existing typescript catalogues into searchable electronic format) action plan and implement;
- Develop the service's webpages following a recent review to include use of Web 2.0 technology, e.g. Twitter, Facebook;
- Participate in commercial digitisation initiatives and contribute to the region's digitisation forum and
- Develop appropriate funding bids in order to address the service's cataloguing backlog with particular reference to the National Cataloguing Grants Scheme.

### Recommendation 5 – Cultural and learning partnerships

'It takes time to build relationships but we can achieve so much more when we work together. Partnerships help to create something special that celebrates our culture and tells a story about the places we live, work and study, and what they mean to us.'<sup>6</sup>

Rotherham Archives and Local Studies will

- Develop an inclusive audience development plan including a schools 'offer', moving from reactive to proactive and from onsite to online and to proactively engage with community archives and local heritage groups and societies;
- Implement a robust mechanism demonstrating the impact and value of the service has on users' lives and the part the service can play in the delivery of regional and local strategies;
- Participate with lifelong and informal learning initiatives (e.g. Adult learners' week, family learning festival etc.) and
- Undertake a partnership review and aim to integrate the service with other service providers to meet service priorities.

Rotherham Archives and Local Studies Service will also strive to achieve a model for excellence and will aim to:

- broaden and deepen public access to our resources;
- embed excellence, scholarship, creativity and diversity in all we do;
- support evidence based policy making and the accountability of decision makers;
- ensure the sustainability of our services by balancing resources across our responsibilities and placing continuous improvement and value for money at the heart of all activities;
- offer high levels of stewardship to our unique collections;
- collect actively to fulfil our collecting remit and to ensure the survival and authenticity of key collections that make up the borough's unique documentary heritage;
- perform to the highest levels and champion continuous professional development;
- integrate with other cultural, learning and information services to offer essential resources that meet people's needs;
- innovate, be entrepreneurial and adapt to new working methods and

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<sup>6</sup> *Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, The National Archives

- provide a place for people to visit and use that are accessible, fit for purpose, attractive and enjoyable.

## **8. Finance**

There are no immediate financial implications to the adoption of this policy and action plan. It is, however, recognised that external funding will need to be sought in order to implement some of the longer term aims.

## **9. Risks and Uncertainties**

If the Archives and Local Studies Service do not move towards implementing this government policy, the following risk and uncertainties will overtime become increasingly apparent:

- deliver poor value for money;
- decrease in number of users visiting and accessing the service with lower customer satisfaction rates;
- less flexibility for users to access information at a time and place that suits them;
- poor customer experience and little or no user engagement;
- staff with limited skills to deliver a 21<sup>st</sup> century service;
- inability of the service to move into the age of digital record keeping creating a 'black hole in history';
- poor arrangements for information management unable to support better decision making and governance;
- increase in backlogs limiting the amount of information available to users and
- no volunteering opportunities.

The service would also see its star rating under The National Archives' self assessment performance measurement programme drop, which is currently rated at 3 out of 4. This in turn would damage the service's reputation.

Finally, owing to the current financial situation there is a risk that there will be limited capacity to develop and implement these recommendations.

## **10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

Rotherham Archives and Local Studies Service's commitment will see a realignment of the service priorities focussing upon 'providing quality education for all, ensuring people have opportunities to improve skills, learn and get a job' and 'helping to create safe and healthy communities'.

Archives can inspire and transform and can make a beneficial contribution to education especially within a formal setting. School children and students can be inspired by touching history first hand. Their development of a sense of place in society, research and interpretation skills, literacy levels and creative talents are all enhanced by engaging with original archive material.

The service through its volunteer policy and active volunteer programme alongside relevant government initiatives, such as the Future Jobs Fund will aim to deliver exciting learning and training opportunities. This will enable individuals to develop their skills providing a way to get back into work.

There are also clear health and wellbeing benefits particularly for the service's older users from volunteering, undertaking research into their community and family, interacting with other service users and recording their experiences and memories. Reminiscence work with older people has proven health benefits.

Finally, this commitment will help to improve and promote the image of Rotherham both within and outside of the Borough

## **11. Background Papers and Consultation**

Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Archives for the 21st Century in action

Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: action plan

All of the above documents can be downloaded from <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/policies/archives-century.htm>

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