



ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
4 MARCH 2024

UPDATE ON THE ARCHIVES, COLLECTIONS AND LEARNING CENTRE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on developments and seek the views of the Committee on options relating to the Archives, Collections and Learning (ACL) Centre.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. This ACL Centre supports a number of outcomes within the County Council's Strategic Plan 2022-2026. In particular, 'Great Communities', by helping to ensure that cultural and historical heritage and the natural environment are enjoyed and conserved. 'Clean and Green', by reducing energy consumption, increasing the use of renewable energy, and reducing carbon emissions. It also supports 'Improving Opportunities' by enabling the Council to continue to provide high quality and targeted cultural and historic resources to schools and young people which will be facilitated through the Centre.
3. The ACL Centre supports the Council's Strategic Property Energy Strategy 2020-2030 and is designed to help contribute towards achieving the amended climate emergency declaration to become a net zero Council by 2035.
4. The ACL Centre supports the Adults and Communities Directorate's ambition to save and make accessible the cultural and historic heritage of the county, which is also a key commitment in the Adults and Communities Strategy "Delivering Wellbeing and Opportunity 2020-2024".
5. The statutory basis of the Archive Service is derived from the Local Government Act 1972, Sections 224-229. Section 224 imposes a duty on principal authorities (which includes the County Council) to make 'proper arrangements' for the safekeeping of their records and records in their custody.
6. A statutory Code of Practice issued under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 states that 'authorities must have in place appropriate governance, organisational capability and technical measures to ensure that they manage information in accordance with the Code'.
7. On 12 June 2018, the Cabinet agreed to develop proposals for an ACL Hub (now referred to as the ACL Centre).

8. The Committee received a report on this matter on 6 November 2023 and suggested that Leicester City and Rutland Councils be approached for an early response as to whether they would be involved and contribute towards the proposed new centre.

Background

9. The ACL Centre brings together in one building the County Council's Museum Collections, Creative Learning Service (CLS) resources and the Archive Collections of the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland (ROLLR), with conservation and technical facilities, public access spaces including the ROLLR search rooms, and flexible space to enable a wide variety of public activities. The Museum Service and the ROLLR are Accredited Services, recognised by Arts Council England and The National Archives (TNA) respectively. Alongside its core function, the CLS delivers the learning offer for Museum Collections and ROLLR which is a requirement of Accreditation for both services.
10. The Cabinet decision in 2018 to develop proposals for an ACL Hub was considered the most efficient way to address the multiple challenges faced in terms of collection care, storage and public access alongside the lack of suitability of current buildings and capacity for growth. This work was paused in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic but restarted in 2022, following an internal review.
11. The next phase of work led to the development of a Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Stage 1 design, which was shared with this Committee in November 2023. This estimated the ACL Centre to have an upper cost of £38m, assuming a construction start date of September 2025.
12. The design proposal demonstrated the ability to consolidate and reduce the current space allocated to the elements that would be accommodated within the ACL Centre and reduce from seven sites to one. The proposal addressed the TNA requirement for an additional 25 years of expansion for the Record Office strong room and accommodated the Registration Office requirement. It did not provide expansion for Museum Collections.
13. Following the report shared with this Committee on 6 November 2023, the County Council has updated its financial position, and the Cabinet considered the provisional Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) on 9 February 2024. This demonstrates the challenging financial position facing the County Council and the need for the Authority to re-enforce its existing financial control measures in order to address the budgets gaps and ensure a balanced budget.
14. Recent discussions with partner authorities show they are facing similar financial challenges and none are able to make the necessary capital commitment required to progress the ACL Centre at this time.
15. As a result, it is necessary for the County Council to separate out elements of the ACL Centre, so that it can address those services that are delivered in partnership (i.e. the ROLLR) separately from those that relate to areas of County Council interest only (i.e. Museum Collections, CLS).

Record Office

16. Senior officers from the three partner authorities have met to discuss options to address the issues relating to the Record Office and an options appraisal is being undertaken to help determine a shared approach and quantify the cost implications of any agreed measures in the short and medium term.
17. There are a limited number of options available. These are unlikely to provide the comprehensive, long-term solution offered by the ACL Centre, but will need to ensure that the core statutory responsibilities of each authority are met.
18. Following discussion with partners and the TNA, options under consideration are:
 - a) procure off site archive standard storage for collections currently in non-compliant storage;
 - b) procure off site archive standard storage for collections currently in non-compliant storage, with restricted public access to minimise retrieval costs;
 - c) build new additional archive standard storage only at County Hall;
 - d) dissolve the partnership. This would require a detailed review of all archive collections held by the ROLLR to determine ownership and enable Leicester City Council and Rutland Councils to remove collections relating to their area and make their own provision. The County Council's archives could then be accommodated within the existing provision at Wigston, which is owned by the County Council. This option is not considered practical or desirable.
19. Options a) and b) require additional revenue to be allocated to prepare and fully catalogue collections prior to removal to offsite storage. This is essential to ensure collections can be accounted for and retrieved at a later date. Option c) requires additional revenue to develop a costed design proposal for, and subsequent capital costs to fund, the build. Option d) requires additional revenue to fund the detailed collections assessment and the review needed to inform the disaggregation of ROLLR collection. As stated above, this option is not considered practical or desirable.
20. All the above proposals assume the ongoing use of the current Record Office in Wigston and necessitate previously delayed maintenance works to be taken forward as a priority. The schedule of works identified as needing to be addressed within the next two years has a total cost of £1,770,863. For options a)–c) the costs would be shared between the partnership. For option d) the sharing of costs would be informed by when the review process could be completed.

Museum Collections

21. In terms of Museum Collections, which is a County Council issue only, a scaled back proposal to reduce the number of storage facilities and consolidate some Museum Collections within the Eastern Annex remains an option. This would create the opportunity to release one County Council building for sale and two County Council rental properties back for commercial lease, generating a capital receipt and revenue growth opportunity through the Investing in Leicestershire Programme.
22. This proposal would incur one-off costs to prepare and transport collections and provide appropriate storage equipment and facilities within the Eastern Annex. Such

costs could be offset against the presumed capital receipt. This would relieve some of the significant pressure on the service to manage the seven current storage locations, by reducing them to four locations. This proposal is due to be considered by the Corporate Property Steering Group (CPSG) in March 2024, an officer group responsible for overseeing the development and delivery of the Council's Corporate Asset Management Plan and all other asset management strategies

23. The current storage locations (and the proposal regarding those that will be retained, and those to be released) are:
- Collections Resources Centre, Barrow upon Soar (retain);
 - Record Office, Wigston (retain);
 - Eastern Annex, Glenfield (retain);
 - Various buildings on Snibston colliery site, Coalville (retain);
 - Unit 1, Coalville (release);
 - Sherrier Centre, Lutterworth (release);
 - Unit at Riverside Court, Measham (release).
24. The three properties to be released are all currently owned by the County Council. It is intended that the Sherrier Centre will be sold and Unit 1, Coalville and the Unit at Riverside Court in Measham, which already form part of the Council's Investing in Leicestershire Programme, will be let to generate a future revenue return for the Council.

Accreditation

25. The Record Office submitted its accreditation return in November 2023 and received a validation visit from the TNA on 5 February 2024. A decision on the Record Office's accreditation status is expected at the end of March 2024. The possible decision outcomes are: Accredited (current status); Provisional Accreditation; Accreditation removed.
26. The Record Office strong rooms have exceeded capacity and the current temporary overflow storage does not meet required standards for archive collections. This means the Record Office is currently unable to meet all aspects of the standard.
27. The Museum Service is required to meet the Arts Council England accreditation standard and is currently waiting to be advised on its timetable for re-assessment.

Risk Assessment

28. As previously reported failure to resolve the current storage situation is likely to jeopardise the accreditation status of the Archive and Museum Services. The Record Office expects to be notified of the outcome of its accreditation application at the end of March 2024.
29. Whilst the County Council and Record Office partners are not in a position to make a significant capital commitment at this time, it is clear that additional revenue and/or capital spend will be incurred. The scale of these costs and how they would be apportioned across the partnership is yet to be determined.

Consultation

30. Record Office partners are currently being engaged on the proposals as outlined at paragraph 18 above.

Resource Implications

31. There is no budget in the latest approved MTFS 2023-2027 for the proposed ACL Centre, but it has been identified as a scheme potentially requiring funding, as a future development within the Capital Programme.
32. It is expected that all options to address the lack of archival compliant storage for the Record Office will see increased revenue and potential capital costs for the partnership. Work to agree the preferred approach and develop costed proposals is underway.
33. The consolidation of elements of museum storage into the Eastern Annex from the three sites, currently costing in the region of £63,000 per annum, would enable the Sherrier Centre to be sold and Unit 1, Coalville and Unit at Riverside Court, Measham, which form part of the Investing in Leicestershire Programme, to be leased out to generate income of £17,000 per annum.

Legal Issues

34. The existing partnership arrangements for the ROLLR set out the basis for cost sharing as a result of any increased costs incurred to deliver the service. Partners have expressed their ongoing commitment to the ROLLR partnership and once agreement on a way forward has been reached, updated revenue, and potentially capital, contributions will be discussed and agreed.
35. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the content of this report.

Timetable for Decisions

36. Following the TNA visit on 5 February 2024, the Council is awaiting the outcome of the Accreditation Assessment. On the basis of the assessment further discussions with partners are required to determine a recommended option for the future of the Record Office. It is hoped to conclude discussions by the Autumn.

Conclusions

37. The financial challenge facing the County Council and the ROLLR partners means a decision to progress the ACL Centre and the associated major capital commitment is not possible at this time. This necessitates the work currently underway to develop alternative options to address the known issues around collections care, preservation and access for the Archive and Museum Collections for the short and medium term.

Recommendation

38. The Committee is asked to comment on the proposals as outlined in paragraph 18 to help inform and shape its development.

Background papers

Leicestershire County Council Strategic Plan 2022-26

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/about-the-council/council-plans/the-strategic-plan>

Strategic Property Energy Strategy 2020-30

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s160429/Appendix%20-%20Strategic%20Property%20Energy%20Strategy%202020-2030.pdf>

Delivering Wellbeing and opportunity in Leicestershire – Adults and Communities Department Ambitions and Strategy for 2020-2024

<https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/resource/files/field/pdf/2020/9/30/Vision-and-Strategy-for-Adults-and-Communities-Department-2020-2024.pdf>

Local Government Act 1972 Sections 224-229 -

<https://cdn.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/local-government-act1972.pdf>

Report to the Cabinet: 12 June 2018 – Archives, Heritage and Learning Collections Hub

[http://cexmodgov01/documents/s138163/6_June_Heritage%20Mus%20and%20Records%20Collections%20Hub%20final.pdf?\\$LO\\$=1](http://cexmodgov01/documents/s138163/6_June_Heritage%20Mus%20and%20Records%20Collections%20Hub%20final.pdf?LO=1)

Report to Adults and Communities, Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 6 November 2023 – Update on the Archives, Collections and Learning Centre

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MIId=7110>

Investing in Leicestershire Programme – Portfolio Management Strategy 2023/2027

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-09/MTFS23-Appendix-H-IILP-Strategic-Report.pdf>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

39. None.

Equality Implications

40. There are no equality implications arising from the recommendations in this report, as the proposal will improve the access arrangement for Archive, Museum and Learning Collections. If a decision is taken to proceed the Equality Improvement Assessment will be reviewed and updated.

Human Rights Implications

41. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Officers to Contact

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