

Cabinet

7 May 2022

Revised Inter-Authority Agreement for Joint Archives Service

For Decision

Portfolio Holder: Cllr L Miller, Customer and Community Services

Local Councillor(s): All

Executive Director: J Mair, Corporate Director, Legal & Democratic

Report Author: Sam Johnston

Title: Service Manager for Archives and Records

Tel: 01305 228929

Email: sam.johnston@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public

Recommendations:

1. Cabinet approves the adoption of the revised Inter-Authority Agreement with BCP Council over the provision of the Joint Archives Service.

Reason for Recommendations:

To enable and underwrite proper political, financial and strategic oversight of the Joint Archives Service.

To provide relevant governance structure to oversee both the strategic direction and standard of service delivered to residents. Ensuring that both governance and accountability are clearly retained by the partner local authorities.

1. Executive Summary

The Joint Archives Service (JAS) based at Dorset History Centre (DHC) in Dorchester is funded pro rata to population by Dorset Council and BCP Council. The JAS has been governed since 1997 by a tripartite Inter-Authority Agreement (IAA) signed that year between Dorset County Council, Bournemouth Borough Council and Borough of Poole, the three first tier councils then operating in Dorset. To allow continuity, the 1997 agreement was maintained through local government reorganisation in 2019. Following a consultant-led review of the JAS, which reported in February 2021, and gathered opinions from officers and councillors, it was agreed at a meeting of the Joint Archives Advisory Board in April 2021 that the governance of the JAS required updating. This was in order to reflect both the new unitary council arrangements and the modern context in which the service operates. The agreement in Appendix 1 is the outcome of that

process. On 30 March 2022 the Joint Archives Advisory Board endorsed the Inter-Authority Agreement and revised governance model as detailed in Schedule 5 of the agreement in appendix 1.

2. Financial Implications

There are no new financial implications for either authority as a result of this agreement. The IAA clarifies the agreed approach to both the revenue (including reserves) budget and capital funding of the JAS.

3. Well-being and Health Implications

None

4. Climate implications

None

5. Other Implications

None

6. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Medium

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

The JAS has a full EQIA which is currently being updated and refreshed to align with our service plan and strategic aims. This will be published with our service plan in due course. Further areas that are being considered include working with younger people and with black and ethnic minority groups and religious minorities. Improved digital provision will also assist in providing greater access to collections for people living at some distance from Dorchester.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Inter-Authority Agreement on Archives, 2022

9. Background Papers

Joint Archives Agreement, 1997

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

1. Background

1.1 The Dorset Archives Service (as it was first called) now based at Dorset History Centre (DHC) in Dorchester, and prior to that in the basement of County Hall, Dorchester has existed since 1955. In 1997, as result of local government organisation, the 'Joint Archives Service' (JAS) was created – to reflect the decision of Bournemouth Borough Council and Borough of Poole Council that they wished with Dorset County Council to maintain a jointly-delivered archive function. This shared endeavour was detailed in the Joint Archives Agreement (JAA) of 1997 and signed by the three councils in that year. From this point forward in the report to aid clarity the JAA will be referred to as the 'Inter-Authority Agreement' (IAA). The 1997 IAA clarified:

- Key functions
- Statutory and best practice standards relating to archives
- Staffing
- Assets of the service
- Duration of the agreement – which was in effect open-ended with a 3-year notice period
- Policies and procedures
- Dispute resolution
- Revenue budget and its apportionment
- Role of the Joint Archives Advisory Board

1.2 Oversight of the JAS is currently delivered via the Joint Archives Advisory Board (JAAB) which is made up of four councillors from each council including the two portfolio holders from BCP and Dorset Councils.

2. Local government reorganisation

2.1 The IAA was maintained through and beyond Local Government Reorganisation in 2019. However, as the original three signatory councils no longer existed and the IAA itself was somewhat outdated in certain respects, it became increasingly clear that a revised agreement was necessary.

3. Consultancy review

3.1 A consultancy review of the JAS was initiated in early 2020. The purpose of the review was to identify if and how the service might improve and what its strategic direction should be. Also within scope was a review of the governance of the JAS. The review was published in February 2021 following delays due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The report gave a largely positive review of the JAS and its activities. It was recommended that the governance of the JAS be refreshed as part of the JAS's forward plan.

3.2 At its April meeting, the JAAB recommended: "That the future governance of the JAS in the light of the consultants' recommendations is reviewed and delegates responsibility to Legal Services staff of BCP and DC Councils to generate one or more options for consideration be supported." A draft revision of the IAA has been under consideration for several months.

4. Revised agreement

4.1 The revised IAA is attached to this report. The purpose of the IAA is to:

- Update the signatories of the IAA to reflect the two recently-formed (2019) unitary funding councils
- Reaffirm the commitment of the two councils to the JAS and to the cost-efficiencies and economies of scale that it provides
- Clarify the formula for both revenue and capital funding of the service
- Reflect the updated legislative and best practice framework
- Ensure cogency with other IAAs that relate to joint services
- Propose a revised governance structure and terms of reference to deliver proportionate, dedicated and strategic oversight of the JAS.

5. Governance Model for the Joint Archives Service

5.1 In April 2021 the Joint Archives Advisory Board approved recommendation from consultancy review to adopt a revised governance model. This was progressed in line with the review of the Inter-authority Agreement and at its meeting on 30 March 2022 the Joint Archives Advisory Board endorsed the revised model in order to:

- Strengthen governance to oversee and steer strategic direction through a dedicated group of councillors and officers
- Increase the frequency of meetings to improve momentum, knowledge (at least 2 but probably 3 per year) and engagement
- Include non-voting membership of external partners and Dorset Archives Trust (the service's support charity) when appropriate
- Adopt a revised Terms of Reference to include:
 - Acting as a focussed, strategic board in place with the opportunity to steer service development, support council business, residents, efficiency and future investment.
 - Ensure the JAS is enabled to deliver services through direct support and advocacy supporting development of a network of appropriate contacts across both Unitary Councils to raise profile, deliver against council priorities and demonstrate value for money

5.2 The revised agreement has been carefully considered by officers from both councils. Advice from both Legal and Finance colleagues has been sought and incorporated to ensure that where possible the IAA is consistent with other areas of joint activity between the two councils. The IAA has a series of schedules which clarify and expand upon certain areas of the service and its governance. These are:

- The function – legislation and standards
- The services of the Joint Archives Service
- Staffing establishment – functions delivered by the Joint Archives Service
- Finance and cost share
- Governance arrangements for the Joint Archives Service
- Archive assets
- Data protection

5.3 To achieve the recommended approach our proposal is to establish a new **Joint Archives Board** with Membership proposed as follows:

- Portfolio holder plus two further Elected Members from each of the two Unitary Councils (6 Members) plus appropriate designated officers from both BCP and Dorset Councils such as appropriate Director *and or* Head of Service for Dorset Council and appropriate

Director *and or* Head of Service for BCP Council *and* Service Manager Archives and Records Management (Shared BCP and Dorset Council Role)

- The issues associated with the IAA and the proposed new Joint Archives Board were discussed and endorsed at a meeting of the Joint Archives Advisory Board on 30 March 2022.
- Other officers (e.g. finance, specialist cultural or other executive directors) could be invited to attend the board for items of interest, but will not be Board members.

5.4 In reviewing other Joint Boards or Committee structures, including Public Health and Skills and Learning, the proposed membership and structure would be considered an appropriate size and strategic level.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The new IAA has been completed, has been reviewed and approved by the current Joint Archives Advisory Board, at its meeting of 30 March 2022, and is appended for information and scrutiny.

It provides an updated approach to overseeing the JAS with relevant and appropriate safeguards to both councils in terms of their respective investments in the service. Furthermore, it provides stability and continuity for the JAS as it works to preserve Dorset's recorded history now and in the future.