

Joint Archives Board

5 February 2024

Budget and Update Report

For Decision

Portfolio Holder: Cllr L Beddow, Culture and Communities
Cllr Andy Martin, Customer, Communications and Culture, BCP Council

Local Councillor(s): All

Executive Director: A Dunn, Executive Director, Corporate Development

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary: The Joint Archives Board (JAB) met last on 8 November 2023. It was agreed that following further analysis of the councils' financial positions the Board would need to reconvene in the New Year in order to confirm the service's budget for 2024/25. In addition, an update on the status of potential capital match funding to support an approach to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) is provided along with developments in a few key areas of the Joint Archives Service's work since the last meeting.

It is recommended that the Joint Archives Board:

1. Support the JAS's 2024/25 draft budget for adoption by both funding councils. This is a cash standstill budget with contributions from the two councils remaining at the same level as 2023/24.
2. Notes the recommendation by Dorset Council officers of a match funding contribution of approximately 10% of the required project total (financial year 2026/27) opening up the potential for an application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund.
3. Notes the positive news relating to service delivery by the Joint Archives Service.

Reason for Recommendation:

To comply with the terms of the *Inter-Authority Agreement on Archives (2022)*.

1. Background

The Joint Archives Board last met on 8 November 2023. This report provides an update on two key financial matters as well as notable developments within the service.

2. Budget 2024/25

At its meeting of 8 November, the Joint Archives Board recommended a cash standstill budget, subject to further analysis of each council's budget position. This would, if approved by the two funding councils maintain the service's funding at the current (2023/24) level:

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council	£313,298
Dorset Council	£299,809
Total	£613,107

As detailed to the JAB in November, in order to achieve this, a saving of £50,000 will need to be made. Work has been undertaken and is ongoing to ensure that the service meets the required figure. Following further work within the Finance teams of both councils, it has been possible to confirm that the JAS budget can be maintained at the proposed level, i.e. a cash standstill. It is therefore suggested that the Board recommends this to both Councils for confirmation.

3. Capital project

At its November meeting, the Board was updated on the current status of the long-standing work to provide additional appropriate accommodation for archives. The current storage position is becoming extremely tight with c. 5% available space remaining for physical archives. Members were updated on discussions within Dorset Council relating to the allocation of capital match funding. The Council's capital programme is under huge pressure. However, following a separate but related discussion with the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), it was agreed that a minimum contribution of 10% from the Council (in the 2026/27 financial year) might be acceptable, if complemented by a significant fundraising programme led by the service.

The Council's capital programme board (CSAM – Capital Strategy and Asset Management Group) has endorsed this approach and has allocated the sum of £540k for the financial year 2026/27. At the time of writing the proposal still requires endorsement by Dorset Council's Cabinet on 30 January and Full Council on 13th February. If the Cabinet approves the proposal, the JAS will be in a position to re-visit the capital project scheme, review content, schedule and costs, and re-engage in meaningful dialogue with NLHF and its new strategic plan [Heritage 2033](#) by submitting a refreshed Expression of Interest.

4. Closure period

The JAB approved a two-week closure period (re-named 'Collections Weeks' to underline the key purpose) for the Joint Archives Service so that staff could focus on activities that were not possible whilst simultaneously delivering public service. This period (15-26 January) is still underway at the time of writing, but initial indications are that the time has proven hugely valuable to staff in addressing areas of work that had in some cases built up over many years. All JAS staff have been involved in one way or another. In addition, a significant number of volunteers have offered time and input to the work. To date (23 January) the following has been achieved:

- Boxes stock-checked and fully audited: 1,750
 - 25 boxes with contents that have been permanently re-housed or re-associated with collections
- New accessions processed: 80
- New accessions catalogued: 50
- Digital archives ingested/uploaded to digital preservation system: 1718 files, 76GB
- Volunteer hours: 234 hours contributed over the period
- C.1200 Ordnance Survey maps organised, sorted and checked
- Other jobs completed including:
 - organisation and consolidation of display materials
 - catalogue consolidation
 - work to add material to RONS
 - library audit work

A fuller report on the closure period will be provided at the JAB's next meeting along with any learning taken from it. Initial findings however suggest that this has been a hugely positive experience for both staff and volunteers. It has allowed the team to address backlogs which could not have been achieved in any other way. Most importantly, it means that the collections the public require the service to produce to them are now in a better order, so aiding that process. If the Board approves, it is suggested that this 2-week focus on collections becomes part of the service's annual programme of work.

5. Thomas Hardy archive project

Since the last meeting of the JAB, the service has successfully completed the fundraising (just under £70k) required to catalogue the archive of Thomas Hardy. A successful application to the Alice Ellen Cooper-Dean Charitable Foundation was complemented by a contribution of £9k from the National Trust. The JAS has formed a very useful partnership with the West Dorset National Trust which will outlive the life of the project and lead to a long-term mutually beneficial relationship where the archives will be used to support interpretation and exhibition at the Bockhampton Cottage and at Max Gate (now known as 'Hardy's House'). A member of the NT's paid staff will join the project for a day a week work alongside the archivist and conservator to learn about conservation and collections management.

An archivist has been appointed to lead the project and they will be taking up their post in early March. A stakeholder group made up of organisations with a key interest in the collection will be formed to support the project and to identify applications for the archive.

Sam Johnston

Service Manager for Archives and Records

January 2024